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HER LOVE OR HER LIFE

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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Her Love or Her Life

A Sequel to "The Bride's Ordeal"

By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of

"Gloria," "David Lindsay," "Em," "Em's Husband,"
"For Whose Sake," "Why Did He Wed Her?" Etc.

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HER LOVE OR HER LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

GOOD FORTUNE.

This flood of fortune
So far exceeds all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason, that persuades me
To any other trust. —SHAKESPEARE.

But since you buckle fortune on my back,
To bear her burden whe'r I will or no,
I must have patience to endure the load.—IBID.

"Wally, my dear, I want you to make arrangements and borrow the gig and horse to drive me to Ice Cliff tomorrow morning to do some shopping. And I want some money—not much—fifty dollars will do."

This moderate appeal was made by the late Miss Mesh —as Mrs. Wally was sometimes spoken of by her friends —to her lord and master, as she followed him out from the breakfast table to the sitting room for a little *tête-à-tête.*

Cousin Wally dropped into a chair, opened his mouth and eyes, and stared at her in utter dismay.

Mrs. Wally looked disconcerted.

"We have been married some months, Wally, and I am sure I never asked until this moment," she said, "and now I only ask you for fifty dollars."

"And you might as well ask me for fifty thousand! Why, Addy, my dear, I have not had fifty dollars, no, nor fifteen dollars, of my own for the last twenty years!" he said.

"What! Have you not saved some money?" she inquired, with consternation almost equal to his own.

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"Saved? No. Why, my dear woman, I had nothing to save from!"

"What? No income from your bridge?"

"No! None for me. There is not enough toll taken to keep it in lawful repair. I get frightened every time I think of it. If anybody should put a foot down through one of the holes and get a leg broke, I should be sued for damages, and then there! As for the old couple that keep the gate, they get no wages now at all. All they have is the house rent free. They make their own living—the man by plaiting baskets and baby chairs, and the woman by knitting stockings."

"And you make no profit out of that detestable bridge that ruined your patrimonial estate?" sharply questioned the wife.

"Not a farthing! Quite the contrary. But it is not a detestable bridge, Addy, my love. And although it did bring me to poverty, I am not sorry I spent all my means in building it! Just see how useful it is! How many weary miles it saves people—some of them old people, and some of them young children—from walking to the North Ford, or the South Ferry, when they want to cross Low River. Oh! I tell you, it is useful! So useful! And that is what comforts me for all the rest," said Cousin Wally, recovering his cheerfulness with this recollection.

"If it is so useful, it is a wonder it does not become profitable," said Mrs. Wally, with a slight sneer.

"Oh—ah! You see, my dear, there were so many, so very many poor people who continued to walk miles up the river to the ford, or down the river to the ferry, because they were not able to pay even the pennies required for toll. So, of course, my dear, I gave all these poor folks free passes. And I never see those poor souls, especially the old people and the little children, without blessing the bridge, and asking the Lord to bless it."

Now, Ada Mesh had been a somewhat selfish, sour and malicious woman, but evil is overcome by good, and it was impossible to live always in Cousin Wally's benign presence without receiving its influence.

"Well, Wally, I hope the Lord will bless it and bless you," she said.

"Why, He has, Addy! He has! I am as happy as a

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king in thinking of my bridge," replied the old infant, smiling.

"But have you no income from Miss Gunn, Wally?"

"Why, no! Not a cent! I'm a gentleman! I'm her cousin! Do you think she'd insult me by offering me overseer's wages for looking after her farm? Or if she did, that I would stoop to take it? No!

"Then, what do you live on?"

"Why, I always get my board and lodging, and first-rate board and lodging at that. And on my birthday, in June, and on Christmas Day, Cousin Barbra always makes me a handsome present, which keeps me in clothes and other things, you see."

"Well, now, will you answer me one question, Wally?"

"Of course I will. Any question you like."

"Well, then, having no home of your own and no income—what did you marry on?"

"On faith, my dear."

"Faith!"

"Just so! If we hadn't married on faith we never would have been married. Marriage is a divine institution. I obeyed the law and left the rest to the Lord."

The late Miss Mesh moaned.

"Will you answer another question, Wally?"

"A hundred of 'em, if you like."

"How much, or what was the amount of Miss Gunn's presents to you, twice a year, in recognition of your services?"

"A full outfit of summer or winter clothes, as it happened, full and complete, from umbrella and hat down to boots and overshoes, and from undershirts to overcoats and dusters, and always with a ten-dollar note in the breast pocket."

"Oh, Wally! I think—I think that was more humiliating than to have received wages from her," said Mrs. Wally.

"Why? No, it wasn't. She and I are kindred, near kindred, who owe good offices to each other, and do them, not for money, but for love."

"And in the meantime, what am I to do for my winter shopping, I wonder?"

"Have you no funds, Addy?"

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"Very little. I have spent nearly all."

"Well, my dear, it isn't long to Christmas now, and when Cousin Barbra gives me my winter outfit, I will give the whole of the inner lining of the breast pocket—the ten-dollar note—to you; that is the best I can do, dear."

The late Miss Mesh moaned again, and then said, indifferently, as if it were of no interest to her or anyone else:

"There is some one knocking at the back door—knocking timidly, it seems."

"Oh, I'll go and open it," exclaimed good-natured Cousin Wally, running out of the room.

The back door was heard to move, and voices and footsteps to approach.

In another moment Cousin Wally re-entered the sitting room, followed by old Peter Lucas, who ducked his little round gray head several times to the lady, and then remained standing.

"Sit down, Uncle Peter. You have had a long walk, and you must be tired. Sit down now, and tell us about it," said Cousin Wally, heartily.

The old man ducked his head once more and then sank, deprecatingly, into the lowest seat in the room.

"Now, then, tell us all about it—who are these strangers t' at molest you?" inquired Cousin Wally, encouragingly.

"Oh, marster, it ain't as dey actilly mislests me so much as I s'picions dey ain't arter no good," replied the old man, gravely shaking his head.

"Who are they? Tell me that, Peter?"

"Dat's jess wot I can't tell yer, marster. Dey's a gemman an' two men—dat's all I know 'bout who dey is."

"When did they come? How long have they been there?"

"Dey come o' Monday, marster, an' dey been comin' ebery day since. Dis is Friday, an' dey are dere now, as I 'spects dey will be o' Saturday, ef not o' Sunday, a breakin' ob de Sabbath!"

"But what are they doing there? What is their business? What do they say for themselves? Didn't you question them?"

"Yes, Marse Wally, dat I did! But dey didn't gib me no sassagefaction. But lemmy tell yer all about it, marster."

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"Do, then."

"Well, you see, dey come fust o' Monday, you know I telled yer?"

"Yes."

"An' dey drove up in one ob dem dere light wagons, like de storekeepers use, you know, marster."

"Yes, yes!"

"And 'stead ob dribin' ob it t'rough de tollgate an' paying ob a quarter to help de treasury, dem white men jess got out an' hitched de horse to a tree, an' 'stead ob walkin' ober de bridge, dey cheats de rebenue and walks down under it, far as de dry lan' goed, an' dey begins to 'samine de foundation arches—a-hammerin' an' chippin', an' at last a-measurin' ob dem wid a chain wot de two men carried in deir hands, w'ile de gemman stood an' p'inted here an' p'inted dere wid his kid glove han' like he was de lord and marster ob eberyfing. An' me and Phebe leaning ober de side watchin' 'em."

"Oh, I know, I know," exclaimed Cousin Wally, turning pale. "It has come at last—what I have been dreading for years! The supervisor of the road has come down to look into the condition of the bridge, and now I shall be hauled up to answer for it."

"That would be 'rather too much of the monkey,'" said Mrs. Wally, indignantly. "Is it not enough that you get no profit out of this bridge that you have built for the public, but that now you must suffer loss and distress from it?"

"But I don't see what fault they can find with the foundation. I had the best engineers and architects in the country for that work, and I know those arches are as strong as the everlasting rocks. Why, they will last a thousand years!" said Cousin Wally, trying to rally his spirits.

"I shouldn't care whether they did or not," put in Mistress Ada.

"But the woodwork is dilapidated. I can't help that. I spend every bit of the money taken at the toll-gate in trying to keep it in repair. I reckon it's flooring they will haul me up about. Did they examine the flooring, Peter?" anxiously inquired the bridge builder.

"Dey jes' did, marster, but not till to-day. All de fust

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ob de week dey was burrowin' an' soundin' an' hammerin' an' measurin' 'mong de foundation arches. An' yes'day dey got a boat an' rowed in an' out 'mong de arches f'om one end ob de bridge to anoder, an' de gemman he had de command. An' to-day dey come on top ob de bridge for de fust time, an' dey begun de same fing ober ag'in dere, de two men hammerin' an' soundin' an' measurin' lengthways an' crossways, an' de gemman standin' wid a pass-book in his hand, a-p'intin' here, an' a-p'intin' dere, an' writin' down in de book."

"Oh! yes, yes. I see it all!" exclaimed the unhappy Cousin Wally, giving himself up for lost. "He was making notes of the dangerous places, to report against me. Oh! I shall be hauled up and fined thousands of dollars and, having nothing to pay with, I shall be sent to prison!"

"Was dat wot he was doin', Marse Wally?" sorrowfully inquired old Peter.

"No doubt of it! Not a bit of doubt of it!" sighed the despairing builder of bridges.

"Well, Marse Wally," began the old negro, solemnly shaking his white head, "I hopes I has been a faithful follower ob de Lord for forty years or more; but I fink if I had fought dat was wot he was up to, makin' mischief 'g'in de innocentest gemman as ebber libbed, I fink I should a fell from grace an' took dat meddlesome w'ite man an' pitched him neck an' heels ober de railin's ob de bridge inter de saft, black mud ob de ma'sh."

"Then I am glad you did not know. It would have done you harm, and me no good," said Cousin Wally.

"Why didn't you ask what they were doing?" inquired Mrs. Ada.

"I did, mist'ess. Soon's ebber day comed on de top o' de bridge, I ax one ob de men wot dey was gwine to do."

"And what did he say?"

"He ax me de back answer, how it was none o' my business."

"Why didn't you go to the other man?"

"So I did, mist'ess, an' he made all de fun ob me. He ax me did I know my mudder was out. No, dat wasn't it, nyder. He ax me did my mudder know me was out—my good ole mudder, as has been in glory dese twenty year

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or more! I made no 'ply to dat 'pertinent question, but 'quested him to tell his business."

"Well, did he do it?"

"No, ma'am; he made fun o' me, and 'quired if I had heerd de las' news. I telled him no, an' den I fought I was gwine to hear somefin' 'bout de bridge."

"And did you?"

"No, mist'ess, indeed. He ax me would I like to hear de las' news. I say, yes, indeed. An' he looked at me solemn as an owl, an' he say: 'Chris'er 'Lumbus hab 'scobered 'Meriker!' I say: 'Wot?' He say: 'Chris'er 'Lumbus hab 'scobered 'Meriker!' An' he say it ober a great many times, till I 'membered it, an' den he telled me to be sure not to forget it, and to tell eberybody I see, 'cause it was very 'portant news. I ax him had it anyfin' to do wid de bridge, but he shook his head awful solemn, an' said I would find out soon enough, an' dat put sich a scare on top o' me dat I fought I would come right away an' tell Marse Wally."

"Well, my good Peter, you did right. You did right," said Cousin Wally, who was still very much agitated. Then turning to Mistress Ada, he said: "Addy, I must walk over to the bridge and see what these men are up to. I cannot rest a moment in this uncertainty."

And he took up his hat and called Peter to attend him, and went off.

Never had Cousin Wally gone over the ground so rapidly. Poor old panting Peter could hardly keep up with him.

When he reached the bridge, however, every sign of the intruding strangers had disappeared.

Old Peter looked up and down in incredulous astonishment. Even the long, light wagon, with its one horse, was gone from under the trees.

They hurried on to the toll-house. Cousin Wally dropped, exhausted more by mental anxiety than bodily fatigue, into a chair.

Peter questioned his "old woman."

Aunt Phebe informed them that the strangers had got into their wagon and driven off.

"Maybe dey'll come back ag'in to-morrow, marster, to finish up de week, dough dey nebber lef' so airly in de day

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as dis before; so it do look like dey was gone for good," said old Peter, reflectively.

"I wish I knew for certain what they came for. But, oh! what is the use of trying to cheat myself? There can be no doubt of their business. It is to examine and report the condition of the bridge, and I shall hear more of it before the month is out," said Cousin Wally, dejectedly, as he took his way homeward.

Mr. Lambe was quite right. The visitors had come to examine and report the condition of the bridge, and he did hear more of it before long.

On the following day he heard that these strangers had been staying at the hotel at Ice Cliff, from which they had hired the light wagon, but that they had been so reticent that no one knew or guessed their business.

In the meantime Cousin Wally was very unhappy. No night did he retire to bed without feeling that night might be the last he would spend out of prison. No morning did he rise without expecting an arrest before the day was over.

Sympathetic, and longing for sympathy, he could not keep his troubles to himself, but confided them to his cousin, Barbra Gunn, who returned his confidence in the most cruel manner.

"Just what I expected, Wally Lambe," she replied—"just what I expected! You have been the biggest fool I ever saw in all the days of my life! And now you have got your folly's reward. A man to sink every cent of his patrimony in building a bridge like that, which don't take in toll enough to keep it in lawful repair! You'll be fined thousands of dollars for it, Wally, and sent to jail until you pay the fine. And you'll live and die in jail because you'll never have money enough to pay your fine. You'll live and die in jail, and serve you right, too, for being such a fool!"

And that was all the comfort poor Cousin Wally got from Miss Gunn.

Near the end of the next week, while Cousin Wally was still suffering the tortures of "a fearful looking for of judgment," a letter from Ice Cliff was brought him.

Now Cousin Wally had no correspondents; therefore when he received this formidable, official-looking missive,

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directed in a strong hand to "Mr. Walter Lambe," he turned pale and sick.

"It is a summons, or a writ, or a warrant, or some awful document about my poor old bridge. I know it is!" he said, as, with shaking hands, he opened the envelope and began to read.

Can you, by any possibility, enter into the state of his feelings when he read the following:

"ICE CLIFF, December 13th, 18—.

MR. WALTER LAMBE: Sir—We are commissioned by the president, secretary and treasurer of the Eyrie & Underhill Railroad Company to negotiate with you for the purchase of Lambe's Bridge. The company are prepared to offer you a hundred thousand dollars for the property, as it offers the most available point for the passage of the projected railroad across Low River. An early answer, appointing time and place for meeting, is desired.

"We are, sir, respectfully, your obedient servants,

"RILEY & O'HALLORAN, Attorneys at Law."

Cousin Wally read the letter through with dilating eyes, expanding nostrils, and gaping mouth.

Then he read it over again, to be sure that he had read right. Then he pinched himself to prove that he was awake. Then he read it a third time, and jumped up and danced all around the room, exclaiming:

"My fortune's made! my fortune's made! I am a capitalist! I am a millionaire!"

"What in a thousand fiends is the matter with the madman?" cried Miss Gunn, who was present, for this scene had taken place at the breakfast table.

"Wally! Wally! Sit down, dear, do!" exclaimed his wife.

"Oh! Cousin Wally! Cousin Wally!" cried all the girls, wringing their hands.

"Oh! Marse Wally! Please try to 'have yerself like a dear, good gemman, sir. See how you scare de young ladies," pleaded the maid, Minnie.

For all answer, the dancing gentleman acrobated over a few more chairs and tables, then seized the formidable amazon, Miss Barbra Gunn, and kissed and hugged her as she never had been kissed and hugged since her baby-

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hood; then, leaving her breathless, flew to his lawful wife and demolished her headdress, collar, cuffs, and bow with the vehemence of his caresses; then, releasing her half dead, he dashed in among the girls, who fled before his face, so that he caught none but Minnie, who screamed and broke away.

By this time Cousin Wally was exhausted, for he was, indeed, "fat and scant o' breath." He sank panting into a chair, while Miss Barbra Gunn gazed on him with disgust and abhorrence.

"Well, sir! Perhaps now you will afford us some explanation of your very extraordinary conduct!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, severely.

"There is the explanation of my conduct!" replied Cousin Wally, taking up his letter and handing it over to the old lady. "You see, the new railroad company offer me one hundred thousand dollars for my bridge! Cousin Barbra, you shall have a black velvet dress, an India shawl, a set of diamonds, and a pointed lace cap!" he added, cutting another caper.

But Miss Gunn, in reading the letter, played "big Injun"—wouldn't admire anything, wouldn't be surprised at anything. On the contrary, she depreciated the offer of the company.

"Don't you be a donkey, Wally Lambe, and take the first offer they make you. They know you are a fool, you see. All the world knows that, and, of course, they do."

"Yes," assented Cousin Wally, simply.

"And so they offer you a hundred thousand dollars where they would have offered any other man twice or four times as much! Don't you take it, or take anything until you have consulted Mr. Gladden and Gen. Bibb."

"No, I won't," said Cousin Wally, meekly.

"A hundred thousand dollars, indeed! A hundred thousand peanuts! a hundred thousand pepper grains! Why, Wally Lambe, they must have thought all your friends as big fools as yourself to suppose that they would let you accept such terms!"

"Oh, is it true? Is it indeed true?" cried Mrs. Wally, whose weak mind was dazed and stupefied by all that she had heard, while through the mental fog floated confused visions of fine houses, horses and carriages; fine dresses

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shawls and jewels; foreign travel and all "the pride, pomp, and circumstance" of boundless wealth.

"Yes, it is true! Ten times truer than he thinks it," said Miss Gunn. "He is thinking about getting a paltry hundred thousand. He can get twice that much, certainly —four times that much, possibly."

"Cousin Barbra, what had I better do now, right away?" anxiously inquired Mr. Wally.

"Do? Why, answer the lawyers' letter first, of course. Appoint a meeting with them at their office for—let us see, now; this is Friday. We must not seem too anxious. Appoint a meeting with them for Monday, ten o'clock in the morning. In the meantime, as soon as you have answered your letter, see Gen. Bibb and Mr. Gladden, and, if you can, Dr. Dutton and Lawyer Barrett. 'In a multitude of counselors there is safety.' By the way, when you have seen the others you'd better let Barrett manage the affair for you," said Miss Gunn, as she arose and left the table, for Jehial was salting down pork in the storeroom, and she wished to look over him for a while.

Mr. and Mrs. Wally Lambe were left alone.

"Oh, Wally, how soon will some of that money be coming in?" she anxiously inquired.

"It has come, as far as use goes! Why, my dear, you can have everything you want from this hour!"

"But you haven't got a dollar of that money yet!"

"But, my love, I don't want it. I know I shall get, at least, what they offer, and that is enough for our purposes for the present. Just only see what credit it will give me. Ah! with Riley & O'Halloran's letter in my hand, I can go to Ice Cliff and get any amount of goods on tick. No one will be afraid to trust poor old Wally Lambe now. So, after I have written this letter, I will drive you over to Ice Cliff, and you can shop to your heart's content. To-morrow will be time enough for me to see the gentlemen whom Cousin Barbra wishes me to consult—to-morrow, as I am not to meet the lawyers until Monday," said Mr. Wally.

And with that he went to the old escritoire that had been the property of Miss Gunn's father, and that now formed a part of the furniture of the sitting room, and he sat down to write to Riley & O'Halloran.

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As for Mrs. Wally, she went up to her own room, over the parlor in the news house, and took a pencil and paper, and made out a list of the things that she did want, added many that she might want, and finished off with many more that she never did or could want.

But Mrs. Wally had had a long fast from shopping, and so now she was determined to have a feast.

CHAPTER II.

ERMA'S PERIL.

Mistress, know yourself; down on your knees,
And thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man's love;
For I must tell you friendly in your ear:
Sell when you can; you are not for all markets.
—SHAKESPEARE.

Erma Wolfsohn was beginning to have a great deal of trouble with her overseer.

Not a day passed that he did not come two or three times to the house and ask to see the mistress, upon some pretext or other.

His manner was so polite and deferential that she could not treat him with coldness or hauteur.

At length, however, but still upon the pretense of business, he began to form the habit of dropping in, in the evenings, after the work was done, and taking a seat at her fireside, though with such an air of deprecation that she could not find it in her heart to forbid the evening visits, which both wounded and alarmed her.

Christmas was coming around again—the second Christmas since the death of her husband and the third since her own first arrival in the neighborhood which had become her home.

Good news had come from the seat of war, and the splendid victories of Scott and Taylor were celebrated in every household.

The rumor of Cousin Wally Lambe's good fortune had also gone abroad, and the whole community heartily rejoiced with him, for almost everyone loved Cousin Wally, even those who laughed at him most.

At this season of general praise and thanksgiving,

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Erma's sympathetic heart, that ever caused her to "rejoice with those that do rejoice," as well as to "weep with those who weep," now led her to put away for a while her private sorrow and to enter moderately into the festivities of the season.

On Christmas Day she went to church in the forenoon and dined at home. But on the next day she joined a small evening party at Miss Barbra Gunn's, and was even won to smiles by seeing the late Miss Mesh, the rich Mrs. Walter Lambe, radiant in a mazarine blue brocaded silk, with real Honiton lace collar and sleeves, and real pearl earrings and brooch.

These were among the first fruits of her good fortune, gathered prematurely, for the high contracting powers were still "haggling" over a disputed fifty thousand dollars, the company having agreed to give a hundred and fifty thousand, and the owner of the bridge, by the advice of his friends, holding out for two hundred thousand.

And it may be as well to state just now as later on that early in January they did come to an agreement, and Cousin Wally got his own price, by consenting to take three-fourths of it in railroad stock and the remainder in cash. It was said that Mr. Lambe might have received even a higher price for his bridge had he not so positively insisted on one condition—that a footway should be left, railed off from the road tracks, and that it should be free to all.

"For I won't have the poor people's short-cut across the river done away with, no, not at any price!" said Mr. Lambe.

And the lamb was as stubborn as a mule on this point.

Miss Gunn called him an idiot—her usual form of compliment; Gen. Bibb swore; Lawyer Barrett sighed; but Clement Gladden sustained Cousin Wally.

"Another lunatic!" Miss Gunn called him for his pains.

But Cousin Wally had gained his point and preserved his footway.

And now they were all assembled at Miss Gunn's, drinking tea together on the evening after Christmas—Cousin Wally splendid in a fine black broadcloth swallow-tailed coat, lavender pants, black satin vest, lavender kids, patent leather boots, and heavy gold watch and chain!

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Mrs. Wally radiant, as we said, in rich blue silk and real lace and real pearls.

" 'Put beggars on horseback, and they will ride to the devil!' " was Miss Barbra's comment on all this; but she made it in merriment and not in malice, for she was happy and her friends were enjoying themselves.

The evening passed very pleasantly, and before it was over Erma had pledged herself to another tea party at Mrs. Morse's, and to a dinner party at Mrs. Blantyre's.

But these were all the invitations she could be persuaded to accept, and these only because they were from her nearer friends and connections.

On the last day of the old year, Erma entertained these friends at a quiet dinner and tea party in her own home.

And this closed the Christmas festivities for her.

Now whether it was because the young widow had entered a little into social life or not, we cannot tell, but it is certain that, with the opening of the new year, the deportment of the overseer toward her underwent another change.

His eyes dared to express their admiration.

It would not be too much to say that Erma shrank in disgust and abhorrence.

Erma was a very young and beautiful widow, who had been bereaved of her husband in the very first year of their marriage, before even their only child had seen the light.

Some fifteen months had passed since his tragic death, and though the first poignancy of her grief had abated under the influence of time and religion, yet she had not ceased to mourn him.

She was but twenty years old, with probably half a century of life before her; yet no possibility of a second marriage had ever presented itself to her mind.

She thought to live only for her little son—Rodolph's son—to educate and train him, so that he should grow up to become a Christian gentleman, and a blessing to his fellow beings.

She thought to economize and to manage his estate so well that it should be cleared of debt and improved in value by the time he should reach his majority and come into possession of it.

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So well had her new overseer met her views and carried out her plans in regard to the property that she was very much pleased with him in this particular, and as all her experienced neighbors corroborated her own good opinion, she was very desirous to retain the services of Mr. Shellval.

"The man is very much superior to his position, and yet he never presumes," said the rector, one day, in speaking of the farm manager to Mrs. Wolfsohn, and the rector's opinion had great weight with the lady.

Perhaps Dr. Cleveland's judgment had been influenced by the regular attendance of Shellval at church, and his profound attention to the words of the minister.

Anyone to have noticed the overseer on these occasions would have pronounced him to be a very devout Christian.

Shellval was winning "golden opinions from all sorts of people."

Mrs. Wolfsohn could not but believe that he deserved them, and yet even while she did believe this, and while she wished to retain his services on the estate, for her son's sake, she secretly dreaded and disliked the man, and this dislike and dread had greatly increased since she had perceived his undisguised admiration for herself.

Had anyone suggested the idea of a possible future marriage to Erma, even with the most suitable gentleman that could have aspired to her hand, the thought would have filled the faithful heart of the young widow with simple horror.

So, the manifest though unspoken love and admiration of Shellval overwhelmed her with terror and antipathy.

As yet he had not uttered one offensive word. His silent wooing had all been in looks and tones.

If he had occasion to ask her such a commonplace question as this:

"Shall I have a new roof put on the old barn?" he did it with a gaze and in a voice so full of reverential tenderness, of ardent passion, that they said more eloquently than words could have done:

"I love you! I adore you! I die for you! Yet I dare not tell you so!"

This often turned the young woman sick and faint.

At first she knew not what to do. If he had spoken

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outright she might have rebuked and dismissed him, but this silent, eloquent worship was unmanageable.

Her manner toward him was as cold and reserved as possible, and it might have had some effect in preventing his outspoken presumption, but it did not control his looks and tones; they became so annoying and distressing to Erma that, at length, she excused herself from seeing her overseer when he called "on business," or otherwise, and sent a message requesting him to communicate his business in writing, or through one of the servants.

This Mr. Shellval complied with, sending a penciled note to inquire whether he should purchase a young team of oxen that Gen. Bibb had for sale, and that were needed for work on the farm.

Erma answered by a verbal message to the effect that in this, as in all similar cases, he really must use his own judgment.

Mr. Shellval took this treatment kindly enough the first day; but when it was repeated day after day, he grew impatient, and wrote a note to the lady, humbly inquiring how he had been so unhappy as to offend, and proffering any atonement in his power.

To this note Erma was obliged, in justice, to return a written answer, to the effect that she entirely appreciated his valuable services on the plantation, and was quite satisfied with his judicious management of it. That she was perfectly willing to leave its affairs in the capable hands that had hitherto conducted them so successfully; that there could be little occasion for consulting herself, but when there was, she wished him to do it in writing or by message.

Erma sent this note by old Septimus, and drew a long sigh of relief, for now she thought she had certainly relieved herself from the overseer's unwelcome presence without wounding his feelings.

But she was utterly mistaken.

It is true that she heard no more of him for the next twenty-four hours.

But late in the afternoon of the second day she received a note from him to this effect:

"MADAM: I humbly beg the honor of one short inter-

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view with you, to discuss matters of importance that cannot be conducted through written or verbal messages, because they involve so much of question and answer. Your own will, madam, shall decide whether it shall be the last. I have the honor to remain your obedient servant,

"J. SHELLVAL."

There was no escaping this visit; but there was comfort in thinking that it was to be the last.

"Who brought this note, Septimus?" she inquired of the old man who had handed it to her.

"Mr. Shellval hisse'f, mist'ess."

"Where is he?"

"Sittin' down in de hall, waitin', mist'ess."

"Then tell him that I will see him at once. As well have it over now as at any time; but stay a moment. It is growing dusk in this room. It grows dark so soon after the sun goes down at this season. Stir the fire and light the lamp."

Old Septimus obeyed these orders, and stood waiting.

"Well, now you may go and show Mr. Shellval in here, and—do you remain in the room."

The old man bowed and retreated.

He found the overseer seated where he had left him. He delivered his mistress' message, but failed to see in the obscure twilight of the hall, the smile of sinister triumph that lighted the man's face as he arose and followed his conductor to the presence of the lady.

Shellval found Erma still wearing her deep mourning dress of bombazine and crape, seated in her armchair before the parlor fire. On one side of her stood the round table, with her lighted lamp, books and writing materials. On the other the cradle, with her ten-months-old infant fast asleep within it.

She had been reading, but laid her book open on the table, and looked up as the overseer, followed by the servant, entered the room.

He bowed lowly, and stood for a moment contemplating the scene, of which the lovely young widow formed the center.

It was a very pretty fireside picture.

Why might it not be his own?

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Perhaps he meant it should.

But if so, nothing in his manner betrayed the presumptuous thought.

He had bowed deeply on entering, and now he stood deferentially, with hat in hand and lowered eyes, like a servant awaiting the orders of his mistress.

Erma could scarcely endure to look on such humility.

"Pray come in and sit down, Mr. Shellval, and let me hear what the business of the estate can be that demands a personal interview between us," she said, with cold politeness, yet without hauteur, adding, after a few moments: "For, of course, I presume your visit relates to the plantation."

"Yes, madam, indirectly, it does," answered the overseer, with a deep bow.

"Then take a chair and let us hear it."

Mr. Shellvel seated himself at the same table and directly opposite Mrs. Wolfsohn.

"Septimus, you will remain in attendance," said the lady.

The old negro bent his head respectfully, crossed the threshold and closed the door behind him.

Mr. Shellval looked from the mistress to the old man, and then said:

"Pardon me, madam, but what I have to say is for your private ear."

Erma looked very much surprised and annoyed.

"You can have nothing to say to me but what may be said in the presence of my confidential servant," said the lady, very coldly.

"Nothing, madam?" questioned Shellval, with respectful earnestness.

"Nothing! I have really no secrets from my faithful family servants," said Erma; but she had no sooner spoken than, with a start, she recollected herself and paused with suspended breath.

"No secrets from your servants? Madam, you are one in a hundred thousand! I have not been so fortunate. I have secrets from everybody. I have one for your private ear alone.

"Then you must withhold it, Mr. Shellval."

"Is that your decision?"

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"Most certainly. For I cannot have any confidences with any man," said the lady, emphatically.

While she spoke he drew a slip of paper toward him, took a pen from the inkstand and wrote rapidly a single line.

"Is that your decision?"

She glanced at it, started violently, while the blood rushed to her face, reddening it to crimson, and then retreated, leaving it white as marble.

"Shall our interview be a private one?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured. "Septimus, leave the room."

The overseer's face lighted up with triumph.

CHAPTER III.

HER LOVE OR HER LIFE!

Capricious, wanton, bold and brutal love
Is meanly selfish; when resisted, cruel;
And like the blast of pestilential winds,
Taints the sweet bloom of nature's fairest forms.
—SPENSER'S FAIRY QUEEN.

The slip of paper handed by Shellval to Erma contained the following words:

"I knew Erma Wildering Herne before she became Mrs. Rodolph Wolfsohn."

The lady let the paper fall from her hands, and stared at the overseer, breathing the question:

"Who are you, man?"

"Moses Shellval, your hired servant," answered the manager, returning her look of dismay with one of insolence. "Yes, Mrs. Wolfsohn," he continued, "such is my apparent condition; but my real social status is somewhat higher."

"Why have you come here under false colors, under a false name, perhaps, as a spy upon me and my life?" she inquired in a low, thrilling tone.

"Softly, madam! You are the last one alive who should reproach another with false shows. Wo married a worthy gentleman under a false name? Who connived at the hiding of an escaped felon here under a false name?"

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"Good Heaven! How have you discovered all this?" gasped Erma, shuddering.

"First, by accident; afterward by observation."

"But you are unjust, mistaken, in many things. I know no one who married under a false name."

"No? I think there stands recorded in the parish register of St. James' Church, Ice Cliff, the marriage of Rodolph Wolfsohn with Erma Wildering," said Shellval.

"The name was a true one," said Erma.

"Yes, as far as it went, perhaps."

"Why have you come here to pry into my affairs?" demanded Erma, wringing her hands in distress.

"I came with no such purpose. I came on my own personal business; nor did I know that you were at Darkwood, or even in the land of the living, until I met you here, and—recognized you."

"Recognized me!"

"Yes, madam. Please to remember that I told you we had met before."

"Met before!" echoed Erma.

"Certainly."

"But I do not remember ever to have seen you previous to your coming to this house," said the lady, passing her hand over her brow, and gazing as if to recall a forgotten face.

"Possibly you may not have noticed such an humble individual as myself; yet I observed you—yes, and dared to feast my eyes upon your beauty even then," said Shellval.

Erma turned away in fear and aversion, and sat gazing into the fire.

"Would you like to hear where we first and last met?" he inquired.

She shuddered and continued mute.

"Silence gives consent. Listen, then. We met on the deck of the steamer *Victress,* in the harbor of New York, on the night of Gustave Perlemonte's murder."

Before the man finished speaking, Erma had started to her feet and stood with clasped hands staring at him.

"Who are you, man?" she asked again, under her breath.

"I repeat that I am Moses Shellval, your menial. But I was present at that murder, Mrs. Wolfsohn! It was

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not a murder, but an excusable homicide. If I had been present at the trial as well, my testimony would have saved Otho Herne from the extreme sentence of the law."

Erma's face had undergone a great change while Shellval spoke.

"Oh-h-h!" she breathed, with grateful fervor, "I always felt and knew that the deed could not have been willful murder; that it must have been done in self-defense!"

"It was, indeed. I was present and saw the whole. Herne was unarmed; Perlemonte armed to the teeth. He whipped a bowie knife from his breast and would have driven it to the hilt in the heart of Herne if the latter had not instantly closed with him."

"You saw all this!" cried Erma, wringing and twisting her fingers as she gazed on him in extreme agitation. "You saw all this!"

"All!"

"Oh! why were you not present at the trial?"

"Because I was absent at the other end of the world! I sailed for China the same night. I was away nearly three years. I came back in a ship bound for New Orleans, where I arrived in June last. I soon left the city for a walking tour, and came on to this neighborhood, where I had some business. But I weary you, madam, with these personal details."

"Oh! no, no—I was thinking——"

"Oh what, dear madam, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"I will explain later. Pray go on, and tell me what fate, or chance, brought you to this neighborhood."

"I said business, lady; personal interests. But you may judge my consternation when I heard, by a chance word, from the old tollgate man at the bridge, that Otho Herne had been executed for the murder of Gustave Perlemonte."

Erma shuddered, put up both her hands in deprecation of the terrible subject, averted her head, and whispered, huskily:

"But he was not executed. That last irreparable wrong was not done him."

"I heard something to that effect also. What was his fate?"

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"The sentence was commuted to—imprisonment for life," she breathed.

"And where is he now?" questioned Shellval.

"I do not know," she sighed, in words scarcely audible to the attentive listener.

"Well, he is not in prison, else you would know the place of his confinement."

Erma did not answer.

"Then it may be, as I have heard, that the escaped convict whom you succored under the name of James Aleyn was no other than Otho Herne."

Erma answered neither yea nor nay.

"Again silence gives consent. Is he still at large, madam?"

"I do not know. I hope so."

"Mrs. Wolfsohn," said Shellval, solemnly, "if I was struck with consternation by the news that Otho Herne had been tried, convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Gustave Perlemonte, what terms shall I, can I, use to describe my feelings when I reached this house and discovered that you were the widow of Rodolph Wolfsohn? The annals of civilized life do not record such an unnatural marriage."

Erma covered her face with her hands and shook as with an ague.

"You could not have known the near relationship of Rodolph Wolfsohn to the slain man when you married?"

Erma slowly shook her head.

"Nor could Mr. Wolfsohn have known your relationship to Otho Herne?"

"No! never, to his death, thank Heaven!" murmured Erma.

"Another question—did he, Otho Herne, when he was hiding here, know in whose house he was taking sanctuary?"

"No," whispered Erma. "In my breast alone were all these fatal secrets locked, and they nearly broke my burdened heart—almost maddened my distracted head. Not till the last day of his stay did my unhappy refugee know in whose house he had found shelter. Then, when an accident revealed the fact to him, he fled. Not from the bloodhounds of the law, as was supposed—for he did not

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know they were on his track, though they were so close upon him that they arrived within an hour after his flight. No! he fled from the house of his victim."

"And he escaped?"

"Yes."

"He is still at large?"

"I think so."

"Where?"

"I told you that I did not know, I don't know."

"Do you not suspect the place of his residence?"

"No, indeed."

"Do you never hear from him?"

"Occasionally, but it must be through some third party to whom he incloses his letters to me and of whose identity I can form no conjecture. His letters are always drop letters."

"Do you write to him?"

"No, for I do not know where to address my letters."

"Then he never hears from you?"

"Yes, he must, and I suspect that he hears through the same party to whom he incloses his letters to me. He always refers to recent incidents in my own life. In his last letter he congratulated me on having secured the services of so capable a manager as had been reported to him."

"Mrs. Wolfsohn, what would you say if I were to assure you that even now I can entirely vindicate the fugitive from justice and restore him with an unblemished name to a happy home?"

Her hands were clasped, clinched together, her eyes were fixed, dilated upon his, as she bent forward, panting forth the words:

"Oh-h-h! if you could! Oh-h-h! if you would!"

"I can, and I will—upon conditions."

"Oh, anything—anything! I would give anything—do anything in the world, to restore him to liberty and honor!" she exclaimed, fervently, recklessly.

"Liberty? I thought you told me he was at liberty?"

"He is at large. Not at liberty. It is not liberty to be flying, hiding, always in dread of arrest."

"Then if I restore him to liberty and honor, as you phrase it, what shall be my reward?"

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"Oh! anything—everything! My everlasting gratitude!"

"Gratitude is but a vapor unless it be embodied in some substantial form," said Shellval, meaningly.

"Oh! then, all my property. My personal property is not inconsiderable. Every dollar, every jewel of it you shall have, and my everlasting gratitude besides."

"I do not want your property, Mrs. Wolfsohn. I have quite enough of my own," replied Shellval, with a slight smile.

"Oh, then, I understand you now. You would restore him to freedom and respect. You would do this, without money and without price. Nay, even without the poor reward of gratitude," exclaimed Erma, warmly and brightly, for all her distrust and dread of the man seemed to have vanished.

"You do misunderstand me. I have my price, Mrs. Wolfsohn," said Shellval, gravely.

"What is it? What is it?" eagerly demanded Erma, still quite unprepared for the conditions.

"My price is—yourself!"

She started violently, shrank back in her chair, and stared at him in haughty astonishment.

"Erma Wolfsohn," he recommenced, quite unabashed by her look, "this is no new idea to me. Long before you bore your present name, on the steamboat *Victress,* I saw you, and was struck by your beauty, struck with an admiration that must have mounted to passion had not the tragic event of the evening severed us violently and long. In the varied travel of the last three years I had not quite forgotten the deep and strong impression made upon me, and yet I never hoped nor expected to see your face again."

"It had been better that you never had. Leave the room!" said the lady, haughtily.

"No! not until I have said what I must say to-night."

"Then I must retire," said Erma, rising.

"No, you must not. Sit still, I implore you. Lady, it cannot hurt you to listen to me. 'Strike, but hear!'" he said, beseechingly.

She sank back in her seat, silent and indignant.

"I say that I remembered your beautiful person, but

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never thought the accidents of life would bring me the joy of looking upon you again. I came here for another purpose. I sought this place as a post of observation from which to look about me. I found, to my boundless astonishment, that you, of all the most unlikely persons in the world, had been the wife, and were the widow, of Rodolph Wolfsohn, and the present mistress of the plantation; but my astonishment, boundless as it was, did not exceed my delight in recognizing you."

"Mr. Shellval, I must insist——"

"One moment more of indulgence, I beg you, Mrs. Wolfsohn. You were a very young widow when I came here. Your husband had been dead but a very few months. I governed myself; you must acknowledge that I did. And although I could not forbear to take so much or so little advantage of my position as to make an excuse and come every day for orders, that I might look upon your beauty, by no word or glance did I offend you. I controlled myself until more than the conventional year of mourning had passed."

"My mourning for my husband will never have passed until I shall meet him again in the better world," said Erma.

"But that is morbid. You are young, even youthful. You will be sought in marriage, and you will marry. If not me, then some other, only that I am resolved it shall be to me, and no other."

"You are very insolent, Mr. Shellval. And once more I desire you to leave my presence."

"I will obey you, madam. But—you take me probably for your overseer, and no more."

"I take you to be my overseer, and no more."

"Erma Wolfsohn, I am your equal in birth and position, and more than your equal in wealth. It is the hand and fortune of a gentleman I offer you."

"And if it were the title and estate of a nobleman, my answer should be the same. Mr. Shellval, I command you to leave the room!"

"Erma Wolfsohn, you cannot mean it! Consider! I love you! I love you with all the power of my soul! Give yourself to me, and I will restore Otho Herne to liberty and honor. I will be to you a devoted husband. To your

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boy a tender father. I will do all that man can do to make you happy. I will——"

"Cease! cease!" cried Erma, stopping her ears with her hands.

He paused until she dropped her hands, and then he resumed:

"Not for my sake, but for Otho Herne's, for your own, and for your boy's."

"For nothing on earth! Not even for him, the poor, unhappy fugitive. Understand me now, once for all. I loathe you, Mr. Shellval. I always, from the first, doubted, distrusted and disliked you. I blamed myself for this feeling, thinking that it was unjust to a man of whom all the neighborhood spoke well. But now I know that my intuitions were right and my neighbors were wrong. And now take the last orders that you will receive from me, Mr. Shellval. Pay yourself a quarter's wages in advance instead of taking warning; render your accounts to Mr. Clement Gladden, my co-trustee, and leave the plantation to-morrow!" said Erma, with cold hauteur, as she extended her hand to the bell-cord and rang a peal.

"Well, madam, I will leave you. And unless you change your mind I will leave the premises. But, in any case, I shall return. Do you know in what capacity I shall return?" he inquired, standing before her, hat in hand, but with a cruel and defiant air.

"I shall take care that you do not return at all!" said Erma.

"In any case—mark you, in any case—whether I come back as your husband or not—I shall come as the master of the house!"

"You are mad," said Erma, contemptuously.

"We shall see who is maddest!" he rejoined, with a laugh.

At this moment old Septimus entered in answer to the bell.

"Show this man to the door, lock it after him, and never permit him to re-enter it," was the lady's command.

Shellval made her a ceremonious bow, and left the room, escorted by Septimus.

"I do not believe one word of the villain's statement! He has got hold of my story somehow, and is using it for

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his own purposes! He may give my secret to the winds, if he likes! Now that my dear Rodolph is gone, I do not care so very much. It will be forgotten before my boy grows to manhood," said Erma to herself; yet she trembled as she said it, and sudden, wild thoughts flashed through her mind of putting the estate entirely in the hands of some agent, or of letting it for a term of years, and then flying with her child to some remote part of the world where her past was unknown, and where her address would be hidden from everyone but her attorney.

She was interrupted by the return of the old servant.

"Any more orders for to-night, mist'ess?" inquired the old man.

"No; I am tired. I shall retire soon. Call Minty in and I will read the chapter to you at once," she answered.

Septimus bowed and left the room, but soon returned with Minty.

At their mistress' direction, they took seats at the same table where she sat, with the open Bible before her.

She read a portion of the Sermon on the Mount, then closed the book and led them in thanksgiving and prayer, and finally dismissed them to their rest.

Then she took her babe from its cradle, carried it upstairs and retired to bed.

She could not sleep. Although, in her indignant excitement, she had said to herself that she did not care though her story were "given to the winds," yet she was, in fact, anxious, agonized at the danger of its exposure. She tossed about restlessly for hours, until at length her baby awoke. Then she took it to her bosom, and its angel sphere of peace enveloped her and calmed both to sleep.

But the morning broke full of trouble for Erma Wolfsohn.

First, while she sat at the breakfast table, there came a knock at the door, which old Septimus answered.

A few minutes passed, and then the old man entered his mistress' presence, bringing a note, which he laid before her.

She took it up and recognized the handwriting of the superscription to be that of Shellval.

"Take this back to the person who brought it, and say that I cannot receive it," she said.

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Uncle Septimus took up the note and carried it back; but presently he re-entered and said, deprecatingly:

"Mist'ess, it was Marse Oberseer Shellbark himse'f as fotch dat note, and he ax me to tell you, mist'ess, how orful sorry he is as he 'fended ob you las' night, an' won't you please to let him come in an' make his 'pology?"

"No, I will not. Where is the man?"

"Stan'in outside ob de door on de porch, mist'ess. You tole me nebber to 'mit him to come in, an' so I didn't, an' likewise he didn't offer for to come in 'dout your leabe, mist'ess; but he do look dat 'stressed an' griebed I's sorry to de heart for him, my mist'ess. Please, ma'am, let him come in an' 'pologize for hisse'f," pleaded the kind-hearted old man.

"I cannot, Uncle Septimus. He has offended me beyond pardon."

"Oh! my dear young mist'ess, don't say dat! 'Forgib us our trespasses as we forgib dose,' you know, mist'ess."

"Well, I forgive him, but I cannot and will not see him," said Erma.

"Why, dat ain't no sort ob forgibness, young mist'ess. To say you forgibs him an' not eben let him come nigh you to speak to you! Dat ain't de way our bressed Lord forgibs us, young mist'ess.

Erma reflected for a moment, and then determined to give the humble and consistent Christian as much of an explanation as she would have given to a bishop.

"Our Lord forgives penitent sinners, Septimus, not hardened hypocrites. This man is really full of insolence and arrogance. He aspires to become master here. His present abjectness is assumed for a purpose. It is hypocrisy."

"Oh-h-h! De grand wilyun! If I was able for him, myse'f would be de 'stroyin' angel wid de flamin' sword to dribe him out!" exclaimed the old man, indignantly.

"I only desire that you will not invite him in. Go now, and say that I can neither see him nor receive a note from him. I will not converse with him nor correspond with him, even on business. He must send in his accounts to my co-trustee, Mr. Gladden."

The old servant bowed, and took the message to Mr. Shellval, and presently returned to report:

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"He is gone, mist'ess. He nodded, an' went away, meek as Moses."

"I am very glad. I hope he will never come back," said the lady; and she, too, hastily concluded that she had quite rid herself of him.

A few hours convinced her of her mistake.

It had begun to snow soon after sunrise, and as the day advanced, the snow fell thicker and faster. Before night the ground was covered a foot.

While it was still light enough to see, old Septimus went out with a spade to dig a path between the house and the well.

Old Minty was busy getting tea ready.

Erma was sitting, as was her custom in the afternoon, in her armchair, before the wood fire in the old parlor.

Her infant boy was playing with the kitten on the floor.

It was early yet to light the lamps. Usually it was an hour later when Septimus closed up the house and lighted up the parlor. But this afternoon the snow-laden sky made the outer aspect seem so dark and gloomy, that Erma, restless, anxious and dissatisfied, arose and lighted the two wax candles on the mantelpiece, and the large astral burner on the center table, all of which, with the high-flaming fire in the fireplace, made a brilliant illumination.

The child crowed and clapped his hands with delight.

Erma looked down and smiled at him, and then went and drew the curtains before the windows.

As she turned again to take her seat, she saw Moses Shellval standing before her!

She started and uttered a slight cry. She had not heard him enter through the unfastened front door, and so she was taken completely by surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

A THUNDERBOLT.

At first she spake no word,
But like dumb statue made o' breathless stone,
Stared on th' intruder and looked deadly pale.
—SHAKESPEARE.

He stood before her, overcoat buttoned up to his chin,

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otter-skin cap pulled down over his brow, hands thrust into his side pockets—erect, derisive, defiant.

"I presume that you know why I am here, madam," he said, after a lengthened silence.

"Apparently to take your final leave," replied the lady, glancing significantly at his dress.

"Not at all. My 'leave,' had I been inclined to take it, was tendered me, you are aware, no longer ago than yesterday evening."

"You are insolent, sir. I must insist upon your leaving the room—and the house!" exclaimed the lady, trembling with indignation.

"But I came to stay, my dear madam. I have not the slightest idea of leaving the house, now or ever."

"Mr. Shellval, you are either insane or intoxicated. I think the latter," said Erma, trying to control herself, as she lifted the baby and turned to leave the room.

But the man was too quick for her. He stepped to the door, locked it, and put the key into his pocket, and smiled.

Overwhelmed with amazement and terror, Erma dropped back into the nearest seat, and instinctively clasped her child to her bosom, as if in its helpless innocence it was a shield and protection to her.

"How dare you do that?" she demanded, as soon as she had the power to speak.

"Because I have a right to do it!" he said, lifting his cap and shifting it to one side of his head, where it hung, adding a reckless wickedness to his already sufficiently repellent aspect.

She only stared at him with a frightened yet haughty brow.

"I have a right, madam," he repeated. "The house is mine—the doors are mine! I have the power to turn every inmate out, and shut the doors and turn the keys upon them!"

Erma continued to stare at the speaker, wondering whether he had bought up all the outstanding mortgages on the property, and had foreclosed, or whether he could have done so; she was so ignorant of law, and so astounded by his words.

"I told you when you forbade me the house and warned me from the premises, that unless you should change your

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mind I should take you at your word and go; but that I should return as the master of the house. I have returned. I am the master of the house, and I mean to stay here as such, whether you honor me by staying with me or not," he said, with a mocking smile.

"Your insolence is unparalleled, and shall be severely punished! Open that door and let me go forth!"

"No; not until you have heard me. But do not be alarmed. Although you are in my power, I will do you no personal injury."

"You dare not hurt me!"

"I have no wish to do so. I love——"

"Be silent! 'Love!' The word is an insult from you to me!" exclaimed Erma, pale with rage.

"As you will, madam. But you must hear me all the same. You must learn from my lips that I have the power to turn you and your child out to beggary!"

"I do not believe you! Who are you, that have come here, a wolf in sheep's clothing, to despoil my home if I will let you? Have you abused the confidence that all had placed in you, and used your opportunity of bailiff to buy up all the claims against the property, and will you press them now to oust us? I do not believe you can do it so summarily. And if you have broken the law, you shall suffer for it, as you deserve!"

"I have broken no law, madam. Moreover, I have bought up no claims against this estate. My right to it is of older date than the oldest mortgage on it."

The conversation, or rather, altercation, had been carried on in low, defiant tones from both sides, and had not hitherto disturbed the child sitting on his mother s lap with the kitten in his hands. But now he looked from one speaker to the other, dropped his playmate and put up his lips to cry.

"Hush, Rody! Hush, darling!" cooed the young mother, cuddling the little, curly, black head to her bosom.

"Have you about the house an old daguerreotype of the late master, Gustave Perlemonte?" inquired Shellval.

"Open that door and let me carry my child from this room!" was all that Erma deigned to answer.

"There used to be one here, and, of course, you have seen it often enough to be familiar with the features of

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your husband's stepfather," persisted Shellval, smiling grimly.

"Open that door!" commanded Erma.

"You would be likely to know Perlemonte if you were to see him."

"Open that door!"

"You asked me just now who I am that comes here, 'a wolf in sheep's clothing,' as you were pleased to say. I am about to show you. But first, look at me, if you please, and tell me if you ever saw me in your life before I came here to take service as your overseer?"

Moved by a momentary curiosity, Erma raised her eyes to scan the brown complexion, heavy black eyebrows, low forehead, face framed in by jet black hair and beard; then lowered her glances in silence, disdaining to reply.

"Ha! ha! ha! No! you never saw me before I came here seeking the post of your overseer. At least so you think! But now look here——"

The overseer broke off and went to a corner stand where there was a pitcher of water and some glasses. He poured some water upon his handkerchief and wiped his face. Then turning around he suddenly whisked off wig, beard and eyebrows, and stood revealed in the brilliant fire and lamplight.

"Gustave Perlemonte!" cried Erma, in a low, panic-stricken tone.

"Gustave Perlemonte, at your service, madam!" answered the masquerader, in a mocking tone and with a low bow.

"Oh! Heaven! Then he was not a murderer!" breathed Erma, in a deep tone of joy, as she clasped her hands.

"So I told you yesterday. Even if he had killed me he would not have been a murderer, only a homicide. But he did not even kill me, you see. I will unlock the door now, Mrs. Wolfsohn. There is no danger of your running away now until you have heard me through"; and suiting the action to the word, he went and set the door open.

"But—but—how did you escape?" she inquired, breathless interest in the question of his resuscitation overcoming every feeling of repugnance against the man.

"How did I escape? By being a light weight and a prize swimmer; also by the fortunate accident of having

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cast off my coat to cool myself that night on the deck, where there were scarcely any other passengers at all, and no women about. I need scarcely allude to the 'fatal encounter,' as it was called. When Herne followed me up, and demanded the restitution of the money I had won from the young commercial traveler, I was excited by the wine I had taken. I drew my knife upon him. He tried to wrest it from me—then thrust me with violence over the side of the vessel—for he was a much more powerful man than myself. I saw people running to separate us, as I fell. They could do nothing to rescue me, although they tried. The steamer was under high pressure, running against the tide for the harbor. The tide was going out. I swam, or floated, or drifted out with it. I was picked up by the boat of the East Indiaman, *Zenobia,* bound for China. I was gone, as I told you yesterday, for three years, and only returned a few months ago."

"But the coroner's inquest sat upon your body," said Erma, with a dazed look.

"Not my body, my dear lady, but some other handsome fellow's! No, Mrs. Wolfsohn, the body that was cast on shore, stabbed through the heart, partly destroyed by decay and partly eaten by fishes—you see I have read up the inquest and the trial since my return—was certainly not mine, though a dozen wiseacres identified it. When I came back here, after three years, I was astounded to hear that I had been murdered by Otho Herne, and he had been hanged for the crime. That was the way in which I first heard it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Erma, fervently clasping her slender fingers, "how I thank Heaven that it was not so!—that you were not killed, as everyone thought—that he was not murdered, as he would have been had not his sentence been commuted to imprisonment for life."

"Now you see that I told you the truth when I said that I had been present at that fatal encounter between Herne and Perlemonte, and knew more about it than anyone else (since I knew that Perlemonte, whom everybody believed to have been murdered, still lived). Now you know that I did not utter an idle boast when I said that if I had been present as a witness at the inquest, or on the subsequent trial, Herne would never have been condemned,

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and that even then I had the power to restore him to honor and liberty."

"Yes, you told me the truth, but the truth so disguised that I did not understand it. All has been disguised with you, Mr. Perlemonte, since you reappeared in the neighborhood. Will you tell me why you have been masquerading here as an unkempt, black-bearded, rude overseer? Why, when you first came to this house, did you not come in your own proper name and position?"

"Why do you ask? H'm. Well, I like a little practical joking sometimes! First of all, I thought that on returning after a three years' mysterious absence, I would just lie low for a while, and look about me to see what my good stepson, Rodolph Wolfsohn, had been doing with my property."

"Your property, Mr. Shellval! I beg your pardon, Mr. Perlemonte! I thought this was the property of Rodolph Wolfsohn, inherited directly from his mother, grandfather, and a long line of ancestors. I thought you had only a life interest in it," said Erma, firmly, for her boy's patrimony seemed at stake.

"Quite right! I had only a life interest in it! But that interest was absolute, as I was still alive! So, to amend my phraseology, according to your word, I thought I would continue *perdue* until I could look about me and see how my stepson had been treating the estate while my 'life interest' stood in abeyance! At first I only intended to keep up my incognito for a short time, but when I found that—ha! ha! ha!—I had been murdered, found dead, set upon by the 'Crowner's 'Quest' and consigned to the tombs of my fathers, I then determined to keep up my disguise a little longer for the fun of the thing. Then I heard of Rodolph's untimely death, and his young and beautiful widow's lonely life at Darkwood. So I came to look at the lovely widow."

"Mr. Perlemonte, will you please to keep to the point and leave out senseless flattery!" exclaimed Erma, impatiently.

"Why, my dear lady, I am keeping straight to the point. I heard Mrs. Rodolph Wolfsohn wanted an overseer. I resolved to fill that responsible situation. It would suit

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my plans for looking about me exactly. Well, I came, armed with the highest credentials."

"Where did you get them, sir?" coldly inquired Erma, as the conviction that these credentials were false ones flashed upon her mind.

"I am not going to diverge for the purpose of explaining that to you, sweet lady. I am going to 'keep to the point,' as you bade me. Well, madam, I came to Darkwood, armed with these highest credentials, and to the presence of the lady. 'I came, I saw,' and I was 'conquered.' I had always a weakness for young widows. I never married anybody but a young widow in all my life! I never intend to marry anybody but a young widow!"

"Mr. Perlemonte, this sort of talk is very unworthy of you, and deeply offensive to me. I beg you will stop it," said Erma, flushing to the edge of her forehead.

"Madam, you shall be obeyed—in time. All things have an end; so shall my talk. And the end of my talk is this —that I love you, Erma Wolfsohn! I love you as I never thought to love again in this life! I loved you—I told you so—I loved you from the first moment that I met you on board the steamboat! Even then, had not that fatal encounter occurred that separated us for years, I should have sought an introduction to you and aspired to your hand. I have told you that that three years of absence had not obliterated your image from my heart, although I never dared to hope to look upon your face again."

"I beg you will cease this, Mr. Perlemonte."

"Presently, presently. I say I never dared to hope for the bliss of looking on your face again. Judge, then, my amazement and rapture on identifying the young widow of Rodolph Wolfsohn with my beautiful inamorata of the sea voyage! Then I determined to win you. I impressed you as a man far above my seeming position. I won 'golden opinions' from all your neighbors. I governed myself—for I am not a boy to give way to every impulse of feeling—I governed myself for month after month, letting your grief for your late husband have its way. I might still——"

"Every word I permit you to speak is a desecration to the memory of my husband!" exclaimed Erma, indignantly.

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"Yet hear me a little longer. I say I might still have forborne to declare my wishes and intentions but that you perceived my admiration and withdrew yourself from my society and denied yourself when I came to ask for you."

"It was right that I should do so. Remember that you have only obtained access now, in the temporary absence of my servant, while the door was unlocked," said Erma.

"Remember, madam, that the house and the servants are mine. I only have the right to enter the first and command the last. But to resume. Your harsh, and I must say, ungrateful treatment of one who had served you well, provoked and precipitated a crisis. Yesterday evening I declared my wishes and intentions toward you, to be met only by scorn and contempt. I gave you time to reconsider the matter, and I came again this morning, a penitent, though for no crime, a suitor where I might have been a dictator, but to be met again with repulse and hauteur. To-night, by a mere accident, I gain access to your presence, and I declare myself, in my own character, yet again to be treated with arrogance and obloquy."

"You have deserved all this at my hands for persisting in a loathsome suit that insults me and dishonors you," said Erma, firmly and deliberately.

"I let that pass and come to the conditions that concern you. Erma Wolfsohn, I am no boy, insane with love. I like you, and see that you are just the sort of young woman that would suit me for a wife. If you will consent to marry me, I will be a good husband to you and a good father to your child. You and he can remain here where you are, in a comfortable home and in a respectable position, so long as I shall live, and after my death—if you both, or either of you, survive me—you will have the estate."

"We should have that after your death in any case. You have but your life interest in the place," replied the lady, in cold contempt.

"Only my life interest; yet, as I am not fifty years old, and may live to be eighty, what are you and your child to do if I keep you out of it for the next thirty years?"

"Trust in the God of the widow and the orphan," answered the lady, with quivering lips, as she clasped her sleeping child to her heart.

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"Trust to me, lady. Accept my terms and remain here!" exclaimed Perlemonte.

"Never! I would sooner beg or starve!"

"As you will, madam. The door stands open, and you are at liberty to depart. As for myself, here I am at home."

CHAPTER V.

RESCUE.

Thou shalt rest,
With the sigh of a great deliverance,
Into our arms forevermore. —BROWNING.

"This house is mine. I am master here. The door stands open, and you are at liberty to depart," repeated Perlemonte, seeing that she made no reply, but only stared at him in a state of stupefaction.

What could the man mean?

To eject her and her infant boy at night?

For herself she had no fears. She would much rather have gone forth, even in the night, than to have remained; for she knew, from all that she had heard her late husband declare, that the law gave Gustave Perlemonte, his mother's widower, a life interest in the late wife's estate. She knew that Gustave Perlemonte, so long as he should live, would be the legal master of Darkwood.

Certainly, she did not wish to remain his guest for an hour.

Nor did she fear for herself to go forth in the night. She knew she could easily reach The Marsh, even through the snow storm, and that she would be warmly welcomed by Miss Gunn; but to take her delicate little Rodolph out at such an hour in such a storm might be his death; for already the child had suffered from several attacks of croup.

"You have heard me, madam?" exclaimed Perlemonte, speaking for the third time.

"Yes, I have heard you, Mr. Perlemonte, and to-morrow I will leave your house—your house, which until this hour I had considered mine and my child's," the lady answered, as steadily as her fainting heart and trembling nerves would permit.

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"'To-morrow?' Why not to-night? My company cannot be so agreeable to you," he said, with an ugly leer.

"I fear to expose my child to the inclemency of the weather," she pleaded.

"Madam, do you not understand that you compromise yourself by remaining under my roof? But, perhaps, you are not fastidious in that respect," he sneered.

"I cannot see how I can compromise myself by a simple act of precaution for my child's safety. Even if you were a stranger and an alien, I might remain your guest on such a stormy winter's night as this; but you are the stepfather of my late husband, and, in some sort, a grandfather of this boy in whose behalf I tax your hospitality."

He laughed a harsh and grating laugh.

"I see you are not fastidious, Erma Wolfsohn. So much the better for me, for I am not scrupulous. I am your lover. I have told you so. I am, besides, a reckless one, who, like the unjust judge of the parable, 'fear not God, neither regard man.' If you persist in remaining here to-night against my counsel, I may become troublesome to you—dangerous even. I warn you!"

A pause ensued.

Then Erma arose with the child in her arms, and said: "I will go to-night, then. I will ring and order the carriage."

"Stay!" he exclaimed.

She dropped her hand that had been raised to the bell pull and looked at him, in the hope of seeing some relenting in the cruel face.

She saw none.

"You will 'ring and order!' Have you forgotten that you have no right any longer to give orders in this house?" he demanded.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Perlemonte," she said, a covert irony under the meekness of her words. "I beg your pardon. I had for the moment forgotten. It is difficult to overcome the power of habit so suddenly. Will you kindly permit your servant to drive us over to The Marsh? Will you be so good as to give directions to that effect?"

"No!" answered the man, shortly and decisively.

"My Lord in Heaven! what shall I do?" exclaimed

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Erma, sinking back in her chair and clasping her uneasy child to her bosom.

A silence of a few moments followed, and then Perlemonte sneeringly inquired:

"Well? Has your appeal to the higher power been answered? Has your Lord told you what to do?"

Erma disdained to answer the scoffer.

"I thought not!" laughed Perlemonte. "If you had asked me what you should do, I would have told you. Nay, I will tell you without asking. Listen: Consent to be my wife within a month, and I will immediately return to the cottage I have occupied as your bailiff, and will remain there until our wedding day. After that I will, as I said before, be a loving husband to you, a tender father to your boy while I live. After my death he will inherit this place of right. Come, Erma, I do not wish to be harsh to you. Only say that you will be mine."

"I will never say it! I will never do it! I will starve —die first! I would even see my dear child starve and die in my arms! Yes, I would! For, after all, there is another world. This life is not all! Not the end!" she passionately exclaimed, pressing to her breast the infant boy, who began to stir and moan in his sleep.

"Very well! As you will! You had better put on your bonnet and go!" he answered, savagely.

Whether he intended to put his cruel order into execution, or whether he meant only to frighten her into submission to his wishes, can never now be known; for as Erma arose to prepare for her departure, the clock began to strike, and before its tenth and last stroke sounded on the air, the merry music of sleigh bells arose and approached the house, and was followed by a quick, resounding rap at the door.

Both the lady and her late overseer paused and looked around in wonder as to who could be coming at that unusual hour.

Old Septimus was heard to tramp along the passage and open the door somewhat noisily, and offer his greetings heartily.

"Why, laws-a-massy! 'pon my soul, Marse Clemmy, is dis you, sar? 'Deed, I is moughty glad to see you, an' so is de young madam, I know! Come in, sar, come in. I'll

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look arter de hoss an' sleigh myse'f. Come in, sar. You wouldn't fink ob sich a fing as gwine no furder to-night, I know. Come in, sar. My young mist'ess is in de parlor a-talkin' to Marse Oberseer Shellbark 'bout some werry 'portant bis'ness, but I know she'll be moughty glad to see you. An' you too, little Miss Fancy! Lor', I didn't see de chile till jes' dis minit, hid away underneaf your cloak. Lor'! ain't she a mite! Well, Marse Clemmy, I don't 'spose as you has a better frien' nor a truer lubber in dis whole worl' dan dat little chile is. How she do cling to you, to be sure, sar."

"She is the angel of my old age," said Mr. Gladden, fondly laying his hand on the child's head.

Old Septimus stepped before and threw the parlor door wide open, saying:

"Here's Marse Clemmy Gladden an' Miss Fancy, young mist'ess."

And then he gave way to the visitors, and slipped out to look after the horse and sleigh.

Clement Gladden, wrapped in his thick overcoat, covered with snowflakes, ruddy with the keen air, smiling with happiness, beaming with good will, entered the parlor, leading little Fance by the hand, and bringing the breezes of paradise into the atmosphere of purgatory.

"Oh! Mr. Gladden! Mr. Gladden! I am so rejoiced—so grateful to see you! I thank the Lord who has sent you to my rescue!" exclaimed Erma, starting forward to meet him, and seizing his hand with her right hand, while she pressed her child closely with her left.

"My dear Mrs. Wolfson, what is the matter? You are strangely excited, my dear. What has happened? I understand, Mr. Shellval is with you; is there any bad news? Is that he? I cannot see very well. How do you do, Mr. Shellval?" said the kindly old gentleman, bowing to the dark figure in the obscure corner of the room to which the overseer had betaken himself as to a temporary retirement.

"It is Mr. Shellval—or he whom we have known as such. But, oh! Mr. Gladden, he declares himself to be Gustave Perlemonte, who was not killed at all when he was pitched into the sea, but was picked up by a boat from an East Indiaman, and carried to China."

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"Eh! What? What is all this wild story? An impudent attempt at imposture? And on the part of Shellval? It is incredible. But sit down, my dear lady, and compose yourself," exclaimed the old gentleman, gently forcing the trembling woman into an easy-chair.

She dropped unresistingly into the seat, but continued, in great excitement:

"And he says he is master here, and oh! I know it is true. And he says that we—my baby and I—must leave the house at once, to-night, and he will not lend me the carriage to take me across to Miss Barbra Gunn's house! And I am so much afraid to walk and expose my child to the storm. He has had the croup and it might kill him. And oh! if he was to die! But surely Heaven has sent you here to my rescue! You have your sleigh, have you not? Yes, I heard it, and I know it is a large one; and you will take me and baby to Miss Barbra Gunn's. I can wrap him up well, and he need not take cold then! Oh! how thankful I am that you have come, Mr. Gladden! Will you sit down for a little while, until I wrap up the baby and put on my things? Will you sit down? But oh! I have forgotten again! I have no right to ask you. It is no longer my house!"

"Nevertheless, I will sit down, for I must understand this matter," exclaimed Clement Gladden, throwing himself into a chair, and taking the astonished little Fance upon his knees. "Shellval," he demanded, turning to the late overseer, "be good enough to come forward where I can see you, and explain, if you can, this story that this lady tells me."

The ex-overseer strode into the strongest light of fire and lamp, stood before the old gentleman and made a deep, ironical bow.

Little Fance stared an instant, and then, with a shudder, turned and hid her face in her old friend's bosom.

Mr. Gladden gazed on the keen, cruel, mocking face of the returned adventurer, and quickly made up his own mind. He reached out his hand and rung the bell.

It was instantly answered by old Septimus.

"Is my man out there?" inquired Mr. Gladden.

"Yes, sir."

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"Call him in, and do you both remain just outside the door, within call of my voice."

"Yes, sar," replied Septimus, leaving the room to obey.

"That is cool, upon my word!" exclaimed Perlemonte.

Mr. Gladden made no reply.

Mrs. Wolfsohn looked from one to the other in sore perplexity.

"Are you aware, Mr. Gladden, that you are giving orders—taking the liberty of giving orders—in my house!" demanded Perlemonte.

"No, I am not aware of it," replied Clement Gladden, quietly.

"You knew me in times past. Do you not recognize me now?" fiercely inquired Perlemonte.

"Yes, I recognize you as Moses Shellval, the overseer. I hear from this lady that you have behaved toward her with insolence."

"I am Gustave Perlemonte!"

"So you say, but your word goes for nothing. The law has decided that Gustave Perlemonte is dead, and has very nearly hanged a man for the meritorious deed of his murder."

"But I live! I am Gustave Perlemonte—the master of this house!"

"The law has decided that this house is the property of Rodolph Wolfsohn, the infant heir of his father, Rodolph Wolfsohn, deceased. This lady and myself are the guardians of the infant heir and the trustees of his estate. Any man claiming to be Gustave Perlemonte, the master of the property, so long supposed to be dead, must first prove his identity, and then establish his claim by a regular process of law, before he can enter into possession. You must have known that, Mr. Shellval, although this lady knew it not, or you could not have terrified her by your threats of ejection. Now that I have explained this to you, I must request you to relieve this lady of your presence."

"I will not go. The house is mine. I will not leave it!" fiercely exclaimed Perlemonte—so fiercely that little Fance was seized with a fit of trembling that caused her to cling more closely to her protector's breast.

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"I think that you will go within five minutes, Mr. Shellval," said Clement Gladden, in a low, level, firm voice.

"I say I will not! Now, what are you going to do about it?" insolently demanded Perlemonte, throwing himself into a chair, stretching out his feet and folding his arms.

"You will leave the house at once, and leave it so quietly that you will give us no trouble at all," repeated Mr. Gladden.

"I tell you I won't! And I defy you to do your worst!" insolently exclaimed Perlemonte.

"No; you will go quietly. You will not compel me, in my capacity of justice of the peace, to arrest you for a breach of the peace and confine you in some secure room of this house until morning, when you can be conveyed to the county jail."

"You would not dare to do this!" furiously broke forth the man, causing little Fance to start as if she had been shot.

"I should not dare to fail in doing it," said Mr. Gladden, speaking, as always, very temperately.

"I would not submit to an arrest!"

"You have no alternative. Two able-bodied servants are within call. I am also here, if they need assistance in executing the law. But come, Mr. Shellval; I do not wish to humiliate any man, for I cannot do that without a personal sense of ignominy. I advise you to retire peacefully and decently. If you are Gustave Perlemonte, you can easily be identified in a neighborhood where you have lived so many years. If you have any claim to this estate, the courts of law are open to you. You seem to feel so certain of final victory that you can afford to be patient for a few days. You would but damage your cause by this forced and violent intrusion upon a young widow's privacy. You must perceive now the policy as well as the necessity of your peaceful departure. It would be too humiliating to us all, to have these men called in to arrest you by force. Come! Shall I say good-night?" inquired Mr. Gladden, rising, with little Fance on his shoulder, opening the door and holding it open.

With a fierce imprecation the ex-overseer started to his feet, seized his hat and rushed from the room.

The servants were heard closing the hall door after him,

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as Mr. Gladden returned to his seat by Erma's pleasant fireside, and put little Fance on a footstool beside him.

CHAPTER VI.

DELIVERANCE.

Then she knew the Lord had set
Himself 'gainst Satan. Who could spend
A moment's mistrust on the end!
—ROBERT BROWNING.

"But, oh! Mr. Gladden, he was Gustave Perlemonte, the master of Darkwood, was he not?" inquired Erma, in a low and frightened tone.

"My dear Mrs. Wolfsohn, this man came here six months ago, calling himself Moses Shellval, and bringing letters recommending him under that name as a scientific agriculturist, an astute financier, an experienced farm manager, and, above all, an honorable and reliable man. A very treasure of an overseer, by name Moses Shellval. With his sanguine complexion stained olive brown, and his bald head, bare eyebrows, and smooth chin all hidden and disguised under heavy black hair and beard, he passed among us all as Moses Shellval, the ugliest and most estimable of overseers."

"I never had a suspicion that he was any other than he seemed until this evening."

"He must prove himself to be some other before we accept him as such. He now calls himself Gustave Perlemonte, and claims to be the life proprietor of Darkwood. Well, he will have to prove his identity and establish his claim through a court of law before he can make himself accepted as Gustave Perlemonte and enter into possession of Darkwood."

"But oh! Mr. Gladden, he is Gustave Perlemonte, is he not? I, even I, thought I recognized him by his daguerreotype. You must have known Perlemonte years ago. Did you not recognize him?"

"Probably, but not certainly. He may be an impostor, favored by a striking likeness to the man supposed to be three years dead, whom he pretends to personate. Such things have been, and may be again. I think this the more possible because I have heard that Gustave Perlemonte

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had a counterpart in a twin brother residing at New Orleans. Certainly, also, this man who professes to be Gustave Perlemonte is much thinner, paler and balder than I remember Perlemonte to have been; also he has a harsher voice. Still, this difference may have been caused by his three years' cruise in hot latitudes."

"Yes," she sighed.

"But in any case, my dear Mrs. Wolfsohn, he had no right to come in this violent and threatening manner to eject a lady and child from the house, who were at the time in lawful possession, and if he had not departed peaceably at last I should certainly have arrested him. Now, dear lady, dismiss the whole unpleasant matter from your mind until it is absolutely necessary to take it up again."

"Ah! Mr. Gladden, how can I, when, in a few days, I and my child may be cast, homeless and penniless, upon the world?" sighed the young mother.

"Never, while I live, Erma, shall the widow and child of Rodolph Wolfsohn want a home or a competency! My dear, only an hour ago you expected to be turned out of doors by this monster to brave the rigors of a midnight snowstorm. Providence sent me to your aid. Trust Providence above all. Trust me as an humble instrument of Providence, to take care of you and your child while that man, if he be Perlemonte, lives to keep you out of your home. He cannot live long. If he be Perlemonte, he is over sixty years old, and having lived an unholy life, he has undermined his constitution. There! Think no more of him, Erma! Or, as Winny Wicket would say, you may fall from grace on his account. Give me a cup of tea instead, my dear."

"Oh, I had forgotten all about tea! I have not had any, either," said the lady, as she laid her sleeping child in the cradle and left the room to give fresh orders.

In the kitchen she found Septimus, Minty and Aquilo seated around the fire, in full debate of the events of the evening.

"Young mist'ess, dis yere can't be true wot Sep' an' Quil tell me, how dat dere funnelly rogue ob an obsereer wants to 'tend for to be our dead an' gone ole marster, Gus Perlemonte?" questioned Minty, in amazement.

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"Yes, it is true," replied the lady.

"Well, he 'tends a false, den! Marse Gus was fair complected, wid light hair, an' dis yere 'ceivin' oberseer is a'mos' as dark as a nigger."

"Never mind him now, Minty. I want you to get tea on the table as soon as possible."

"Ten I'll hab to make some fresh, mist'ess, 'cause dis has drawed an' drawed an' drawed till it is bitter as gall. An', mist'ess, seein' as you's down in your min', wouldn't yer like a frisky chicken? Dere's a cold b'il'd chicken lef' f'om dinner in de pantry, an' I can make it frisky in 'bout quarternour."

"Y-yes, Minty, if you can be quick over it, we will have the fricassee chicken," said the lady, as she left the kitchen and returned to the parlor.

"Tea will be ready in a short time, Mr. Gladden, and I hope that you will stay all night. It is still snowing very fast, and freezing as it falls," said Erma.

"Thanks, we will remain until morning, my dear lady—not because of the snowstorm, however, for I and little Fance are accustomed to brave all weathers. Are we not, my little girl?" said the old man, turning to his favorite.

"Yes, daddy; but I don't want no more ugly old overseers," said the child, inconsequently.

"And you shall not have any more. That is why daddy stays here to-night. Yes, Mrs. Wolfsohn, I am not afraid of the weather, but am afraid to leave you unprotected and at the mercy of that lunatic. We have been dining, you must know, at The Marsh, and Miss Gunn would have constrained us to stay if she could have done so; but we were set to get home—especially Fance."

"Well, daddy, I wanted to put my tortoise se'll pussy to bed, and I knowed s'e would be lonesome wivout me," put in the child.

"Certainly. But now we must let pussy take care of herself, and we must stay and take care of Mrs. Wolfsohn, for fear that cruel man should come back and frighten her again."

"Yes," said Fance, "I s'pose we must, daddy."

In a few minutes old Septimus appeared and announced tea.

Mr. Gladden gave his arm to Erma, and led the way to

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the dining room, followed by Septimus, who had lifted the child on his shoulder, and leaving Minty, who had come in for the purpose, on duty to watch the baby's cradle.

The stormy interview with Shellval, alias Perlemonte, had not taken away the appetite of Erma's guest, and the old gentleman and the little child seemed thoroughly to enjoy Aunt Minty's fragrant young hyson, light muffins and delicate "frisky chicken."

When the late repast was over, the small party adjourned for a few moments to the parlor, where a short evening worship was led by Clement Gladden, and then all separated to retire to rest.

Old Septimus attended Mr. Gladden to the guest chamber, that was always kept in readiness for company.

Erma led little Fance to her own room, and put her to sleep in the same bed with herself and her baby.

Did the sphere of the healthy and happy children envelop her troubled spirit in its own peace?

Probably; for despite all her cares and anxieties she soon fell asleep and slept profoundly.

In the morning, however, she awoke with the dull, heavy heartache that comes with a half remembered sorrow after the oblivion of sleep.

She immediately recalled the astounding discovery of the previous night—the event that was about to beggar herself and her child.

But she had little time to indulge her feelings. The children were awake, and, both delighted with each other, were laughing, screaming and tumbling over and over, from the front to the back of the bed, to and fro.

She got up and dressed them herself, amid much romping resistance.

Then she seated them both on the floor, where Fance took charge of the baby while the mother made her own toilet.

Finally she took her boy in her arms and went downstairs, followed by Fance.

They found Mr. Gladden in the parlor, standing with his back to the fire, looking at the pictures in "Heath's Book of Beauty," which, by the way, he had seen about a dozen times before.

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After the kindly morning greetings had passed, Clement Gladden said:

"I have taken the liberty of sending Aquilo, with the sleigh, for Miss Barbra Gunn, with an earnest request that she will come over and spend the day with you. I cannot leave you, even by daylight, without some protection."

"Oh! how kind and thoughtful you are. How much I thank you."

"I told Aquilo," said the old gentleman, wincing a little at the lady's warmth of acknowledgment—"I told him that he might tell Miss Gunn what had happened here, as far as he knew and understood it. I deemed it better to do that than to write a note, as the boy's incomprehensible news would be sure to bring the old lady hurrying here for an explanation," he added, with a smile.

Erma also smiled, in the midst of all her care and anxiety—smiled to think what a buzz of conjecture there would be at The Marsh on hearing that her late overseer, Moses Shellval, had metamorphosed himself into the deceased and resuscitated Gustave Perlemonte, a claimant of the Darkwood estate.

"It is a glorious day after the snowstorm. Look!" exclaimed Mr. Gladden, going to the front window and withdrawing the old yellow moreen curtains.

"Snow and ice change the character of a landscape so completely," said Erma, standing by the old man's side and gazing out. "Low River being frozen over and covered with snow, seems no longer a river, but a deep valley between long hills."

Breakfast was announced at this moment, and they went into the dining room, where Minty had spread one of her most tempting morning meals.

Erma took the head of the table, with her child in a high chair beside her, and Mr. Gladden and little Fance on her right and left.

Erma served her guests, but could only make a pretense of breakfasting herself.

Clement Gladden saw this, and presently put a home question to her:

"My dear young lady, tell me, would you really be sorry to have it proved beyond a possibility of doubt that

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the so-called Moses Shellval was in reality Gustave Perlemonte?"

Erma started, flushed and paled, but did not answer.

"Although the reappearance of Gustave Perlemonte should deprive you and your child of your home and living here, for so long as he, Perlemonte, shall live, would you be sorry that he was not killed? that no murder was done? that the unhappy fugitive from justice, now living in exile and leading a life of terror, should be able to return to his native land and live in peace? Would you be sorry?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no! Heaven forgive me, if in my grief and anxiety for my child's good, I have seemed to forget all that! Oh, no! I ought to be glad, and I am glad, even though we become homeless for a time!"

"Only for a time, Erma. And only as regards this house. Another house you will have at Brighthome."

"Oh! sir, you are kind—much too kind. But I could not so heavily tax your hospitality. No! If I am driven hence I must seek again a situation as governess in some family."

"But your young child, my dear lady, your young child! You could not take him into a stranger's family, nor could you be separated from him," said Clement Gladden, gently.

"True—too true! I had forgotten; that would be a difficulty. Oh! what shall I do?" exclaimed Erma, clasping her hands in her distress.

"Come to me, Mrs. Wolfsohn. Come to me, Erma."

"But indeed I cannot take such advantage of your goodness as to burden you with our support," she sighed.

"Listen, Erma. You know how hard I have been trying to get a lady as governess to this little girl of mine. If you will not come as my guest, Erma, come as her teacher, bringing your child with you. You know that I love children, and children love me. That which would be an objection to most people—the child—would be and is a positive recommendation to me. Come to me and bring your child, who will soon grow to be a companion for my little Fance."

"Oh! Mr. Gladden, your goodness overpowers me. Yes, indeed, I will go to you. And oh! I will try to prove my gratitude. I will pray to the Lord to enable me to do

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it. Yes, I will go to Brighthome, if I should be driven away from this place. And I suppose there is no doubt I shall be driven away from it, Mr. Gladden. What do you think?"

"I—think it probable that Moses Shellval will prove himself to be Gustave Perlemonte, in which case you will have to vacate this place."

"I thought that was your opinion. Well, I will go."

"And, Erma, even then you will not be sorry that Gustave Perlemonte still lives; that no murder has been done; that the unhappy fugitive from justice may return in peace and safety? You will not be sorry?"

"Oh! no, no! But, Mr. Gladden," she continued, dropping her voice to an awe-struck tone, "do you know—do you know——" She could speak no further; her voice had broken down.

"My child, I know no more than the reported trial in the newspapers has taught me. But of late I have suspected much. Let us talk no further on that subject, Erma. I do not wish to intrude upon your confidence, dear."

She would have answered this by assuring him that he, of all persons, was most worthy of her confidence, but she could not yet command her voice. Every allusion to that wretched exile overcame her utterly.

The ringing of the sleigh bells struck upon their ears.

"It is our sleigh, with Miss Barbra Gunn in it!" exclaimed little Fance, who had run to the hall door and back again.

It was Miss Barbra Gunn, and they all arose and went out to receive her.

The old lady came bustling in like the northwest wind in a gale.

"How do, Erma? How do, Clem. Gladden? How do, Fance? How do, baby? How do, everybody? Now, what's this cock-and-a-bull story Aquilo has been telling me of your poor overseer going suddenly crazy and fancying himself to be the late Mr. Perlemonte, and the proprietor of the place?" she demanded of people in general, after she had shaken hands around.

"Come in and sit down, Miss Gunn, and we will ex-

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plain," said Erma, leading the way into the old parlor and offering the best easy-chair.

Miss Barbra dropped into the seat, untied her big black satin bonnet, and laid it on the center table beside her, stretched her cold feet out to the fire, and said:

"Now, tell me all about it. Is the man secured? Was he very violent?"

"He was violent, Miss Gunn," said Erma, looking toward Mr. Gladden, as if expecting him to give all necessary information.

"Did Aquilo tell you that the man had gone crazy?" inquired Clement Gladden.

"No, not in so many words; but, of course, I knew he had, because, of course, if he hadn't been raving mad he never would have taken up such a luny idea! It is a wonder he stopped there! It is a wonder he did not fancy himself the King of France, or the Emperor of Russia! When was he taken so?"

"You are under a delusion, Miss Gunn. Moses Shellval is not the least mad, but will probably prove himself to be Gustave Perlemonte, whom we have all so long supposed to have been dead," Mr. Gladden explained.

"What!" exclaimed Miss Barbra, turning suddenly around and staring at the speaker.

"I say that Shellval will probably prove his claim to be Perlemonte," repeated Clement Gladden, quietly.

Miss Barbra Gunn put her hand in her pocket, drew out her black morocco spectacle case, opened it, pulled out her glasses, wiped them carefully, adjusted them on her nose, and deliberately surveyed the old gentleman from head to foot, and then inquired:

"Have you also gone crazy, Clem. Gladden?"

"Miss Barbra," said Erma, "it seems almost incredible, but it is probably true, as my late overseer declares, that Gustave Perlemonte was not killed that night when he was thrown overboard—was not even hurt—but was borne out by the tide, and kept himself afloat until he was picked up by a boat belonging to an outward bound East Indiaman, and——"

"Hush, child! You are all gone crazy together!" exclaimed Miss Barbra, in disgust.

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But Erma continued, without regard to her interruption:

"He was taken all around the world, and was absent nearly three years, during which his unhappy antagonist was tried and condemned for his murder," she said, with a shudder that compelled her to silence for a while.

"Fudge! Nonsense! Fiddlestick!" interpolated Miss Barbra.

Erma rallied her spirits and resumed:

"He came back here several months ago, so artfully disguised, looking so opposite to what he really was, that no one recognized him, until it suited his own purposes to throw off his disguise and declare his identity. Then even I, who had never seen Gustave Perlemonte to know him, recognized him by his likeness to his photograph and——"

"So you will admit the claim of a villainous adventurer who comes to you in disguise, under a false name, and with forged letters of recommendation—knowing all these circumstances, you will admit the claim of such an impostor merely because he says that he is Gustave Perlemonte, and bears some resemblance to Perlemonte's old photograph? And you will let him walk in aud turn you and your son out of your inheritance? I am ashamed of you, Erma Wolfsohn! I had not an idea that you were such an idiot!"

"Not so fast, my dear Miss Gunn," said Mr. Gladden, good-humoredly. "We admit nothing of the sort, and permit nothing of the sort, because it is possible, though extremely improbable, that the man is an impostor. He must prove his identity as Gustave Perlemonte, and establish his claim through a regular course of law before he can be recognized as Gustave Perlemonte, or allowed to re-enter these doors, in any capacity, much less to take possession as master."

"Oh! well, I am glad you have some remnant of good sense left. But, now, is it not the most incomprehensible thing in the world that the man, if he is what he pretends to be, should have escaped death?"

"No, I do not think so," said Mr. Gladden.

And thereupon began a discussion of the event that lasted until Mr. Gladden arose to go.

"I took the liberty of sending for you, Miss Gunn, feel-

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ing sure that you would come if called upon, and remain with Mrs. Wolfsohn to-day. I hardly think it safe to leave her here unprotected. The man—Shellval, or Perlemonte, whichever he may be—was insolent and terrified her when he came to declare himself last evening. Fortunately I came in time to send him about his business; but I thought it necessary to remain here all night and to send for you to take my place this morning, lest the fellow should take advantage of my departure, to return and give trouble."

"I wish he would!" broke forth Miss Gunn. "Oh! I just wish he would only show his villainous face here while I am about! I'd give him such a welcome he would never come back again! Let him dare to come here! Ha!"

And Miss Barbra Gunn snorted like an old war horse that "scents the battle afar off."

But the sleigh was waiting, and Mr. Gladden, with an affectionate leave of Erma and her child, and a friendly adieu to Miss Gunn, took little Fance by the hand and departed.

Then Erma told Miss Gunn the whole of the terrible scene that had taken place on the evening before, just previous to the opportune arrival of Mr. Gladden.

"And so the wretch had the audacious insolence to propose to marry you?" exclaimed the horrified and indignant old lady.

"Yes."

"Did you tell Clem. Gladden that?"

"Oh! of course not, Miss Barbra! It was too deeply humiliating! I felt too much mortified to speak of it to any man—even to him. No, I only told him that I was ordered to leave the house, with my child, then, in the night, in a snowstorm, and refused the use of the carriage. That was bad enough, without the other. I thought I was obliged to go then. I thought that this Shellval, or Perlemonte, had the power to eject me summarily, and so I begged Mr. Gladden to take me and the child away in his sleigh to some neighbor's house for shelter."

"What a poor little softy you were, Erma!"

"Yes," said the young woman, meekly.

"And I suppose if Clem. Gladden had not happened to

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come in just when he did, you would have turned out in the storm, at that brute's command?"

"Yes."

"Poor little simpleton! Well, luckily Clem. Gladden did arrive, and my gentleman claimant was turned out instead of you! But Clement Gladden ought to have arrested him for a breach of the peace and sent him to jail! He is a magistrate, and he could have done it, and he should have done it!"

"You know Mr. Gladden never likes to use any severity that can be avoided. He contented himself by compelling the intruder to leave the house. That was enough."

"No, it wasn't. Because I have got to stay here and guard you from his future attacks, which I need not do if he were safely locked up in jail, where he ought to be."

"Oh! Miss Barbra," said Erma, deprecatingly, "I fear that I am putting you to great inconvenience, in needing you to stay with me."

"Not at all! I want to stay. And oh! if that man would only dare to show his face while I am to the fore!"

Apparently her wish was about to be realized.

A resounding knock was heard on the hall door.

Erma, trembling, stole to the front window and peeped through the division of the curtain.

"Oh! it is Perlemonte himself!" she gasped, turning deadly pale.

"Who?" sharply demanded Miss Gunn, rising and coming to her side.

"It is Perlemonte—I mean Shellval—himself! And there! Septimus has gone to open the door!" faltered Erma, sinking into a chair and trembling excessively.

"Oh! All right! You sit down there, my dear! Don't you move! I'll see this hero! Let him come in!"

CHAPTER VII.

REFUGE.

Soon a home will greet thee,
Ready kindness meet thee,
And love that will not flee. —PERCIVAL.

While the two ladies stood up in the parlor—Erma pale and frightened, Miss Gunn fierce and warlike—in the mo-

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mentary expectation of the enemy's entrance, they heard the hall door quietly close and footsteps peacefully leave the porch.

"He is gone! Oh! he is gone! Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Erma, with a sigh of relief.

"Gone!" cried Miss Gunn, in disappointed wrath. "Then you may depend he must have caught a glimpse of me as he passed the window and run away! But he needn't do that! I'll follow him down to his own house and have it out with him there, the grand villain! To come here threatening and frightening a poor, lonely young widow! It would not take much to make me give him a good, sound cowhiding with my own hand! I'll——"

Miss Gunn's further words were cut short by the reentrance of old Septimus with a large key in his hand, which he laid before his mistress, saying:

"De key ob de oberseer's house, ma'am, which he tells me to 'libber up to you, wid his dis'pectful 'gards, an' he'll 'municate wid you t'rough his 'torney ob law."

"Oh! he will communicate with you through his attorney! Upon my word!" snorted Miss Gunn.

"But it is a great relief, Miss Barbra. I would rather meet anyone than that man again face to face. And, Miss Barbra, I fear that he is Gustave Perlemonte, after all! I fear there can be no doubt about it!" said Erma.

"Then you ought not to say it, even if you think it! Though it don't matter—come to consider, it really don't matter what you say or think about his identity; for, as you never saw Gustave Perlemonte before he left the neighborhood and was reputed to be killed, you are not a competent witness in the case."

"Neither is Septimus here, by reason of his being a darkey and a slave; so we will ask his opinion," said Erma; and, turning to the old man, she inquired:

"Uncle Sept, did you recognize that man as your former master, Mr. Perlemonte?"

"Now, my dear young mist'ess, I hopes you'll 'scuse an' forgib me for wot I's gwine to say. But if you axes me no questions, I'll tell you no lies. I don't want to 'mit myse'f by 'mittin' anyfin' about de oberseer. I don't. Yer see, young mist'ess, I don't want for people to go about

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sayin': 'Dat oberseer, Shellbark, must be Mr. Gustave Perlemonte, 'cause dat 'spectable ole colered ge'man, Mr. Septimus Ebony, ree-cognified him hisse'f!' No, mist'ess; I don't want to 'mit myse'f by no sich 'knowledgments," said the old man, solemnly shaking his head.

"But, Septimus, if he is Mr. Perlemonte, we ought not to deny the fact," said Erma, gravely.

"Young mist'ess, I neider 'nies it, nor yet 'serts it. But I ain't a gwine to 'mit myse'f to help to prove he is him, to turn you an' de little marster out'n your own house and home, in de favor ob strangers," persisted Septimus.

"And you are right, old man! Perfectly right," spoke up Miss Gunn. "In the first place, it is an atrocious law that gives Gustave Perlemonte, an alien, a stranger, a gambler, a black-leg, an out-and-out villain and vagabond, the life interest in this estate, which enables him to turn out the lineal heirs, whose ancestors have held this property for centuries! So I say, let no one who cares for this widow and orphan, or for the old name of Wolfsohn, recognize this vagrant. I wish I had the power of putting him in the stocks! And I wish there were stocks to put him in!"

"I—I see de stocks once, w'en I was a little shaver, down to Staunton. An'—an' I fink I could rig up a set outen a hurdle an' a pair o' ox yokes," suggested the old man, smacking his lips.

"And help to put the villainous overseer into them also!" said Miss Gunn, with her sharp, black eyes twinkling.

"Sartain, ma'am, wid de greatest ob pleasure, if I was so ordered by my young mist'ess an' had anybody to help me!" answered Septimus, in perfect good faith.

"Ah! it is a pity that such honest folk as you and I have not absolute power to deal with rogues and vagabonds, isn't it, Sept?"

"'Tis, indeed, ole mist'ess."

"What would you do if you had the power, Sept?" inquired Erma, smiling slightly.

"Does yer mean, wot would I do wid sich waggy bones as dis oberseer, young mist'ess?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't hurt him much, mist'ess. Wouldn't put um

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in no pain, ef I could 'went it, 'cause I don't like to see people suffer; but I would just smudder um easy and comfor'ble, an' put um underneat ob de groun' where dey couldn't come out no more to do no harm, nor mislest helpless ladies an' innocen' childun. Dere! dat's wot I'd do wid um! Smudder um, an' put um in de groun'."

"If I were a queen, Septimus, you should be my prime minister," said Miss Gunn, nodding her head approvingly.

"Tanky, old mist'ess. I is much obleeged to you all de same," said Sept, with a bow.

"Oh! you are quite welcome."

"Now, my mist'esses, if you'll 'scuse me, I'll go back to de kitchen to pick a chicken for Minty. Sister Minty wants to get a frisky chicken for mist'ess's dinner! Mist'ess—leastways Sister Minty alless gets a frisky chicken for her young mist'ess w'en her young mist'ess is low in her mind. She alless finds it werry s'portin' to her sperrits," said the old man, as he made a deep bow and left the parlor.

"What in the deuce is he talking about, anyhow?" inquired Miss Gunn.

Erma laughed, despite her cares.

"A fricassee chicken, which poor old Minty thinks a panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to," she said.

"Well, it isn't a bad thing, anyhow. We had one last night for supper to please Wally's wife. And oh, by the way! Ha—ha—ha! Ho—ho—ho! I have got another piece of news to tell you about her——"

"About whom?"

"Miss Mesh—bother!—I mean Mrs. Wally Lambe! But I shall forget and call her Miss Mesh to the end of my life, I am afraid," said Miss Gunn.

"So shall I," smiled Erma.

"Well, my dear, what do you think?"

"I am sure I do not know."

"She is making up baby linen."

"Eh?"

"She is making up baby linen."

"What?"

"True as I live, she is. And I reckon by the time they move into their new house, the event will be celebrated by the arrival of an heir."

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"Oh! I am so glad! How happy they are! and how much happier they will be! And to think of it! Little more than a year ago they were both so poor and dependent, and each so lonely and desolate, and now they are wealthy, independent, united and happy. It makes me quite joyous to think of it!" exclaimed Erma, her face radiant with loving sympathy.

"Makes you joyous to think of it, does it? Well, it would make you merry to see it. You'd laugh until you cried, so you would, to see what a jackass poor old Wally does make of himself! Why, he will hardly let his 'Ada' cut up her own food, or wipe her own mouth. You never saw such a noodle! Always reminds me of the old saying that 'there's no fool like an old fool!' However, they said yesterday that they were coming over to spend the afternoon and take tea with you to-day, so you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself. And oh! talking of that, I had like to have forgotten Cousin Wally's message! Now what do you suppose he said to me at parting?"

"I am sure I could not guess," said Erma.

"Why, he said: 'I hope, Cousin Bab, that there is no serious trouble at Darkwood. I hope it is nothing but niggers' tales, but please tell her we are coming to tea, and ask her would she mind having a cold roast duck for Ada? Ada dotes on cold roast ducks for her tea, and in her delicate health, you know, we all ought to indulge her!' There! what do you think of our Wally now for an old booby?"

"I like him all the better," said Erma, with a smile; "and he shall have Ada's favorite delicacy prepared. But we must have the duck dressed and cooked at once, in order that it may have time to cool before tea."

And so saying she went out to the kitchen to give the necessary orders.

Miss Gunn took out her knitting and went to work.

The two ladies dined *tête-à-tête* off the "frisky" chicken, vegetables, rice pudding and preserved peaches and cream.

Quite early in the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Wally Lambe drove up in a buggy.

Erma received them both with much cordiality.

But poor Cousin Wally's usually happy face was as solemn as an owl's.

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The fact is that he had heard in the course of the day all about the reappearance of Gustave Perlemonte, and he knew that meant the ejectment of Erma and her child from their home and living. He sympathized profoundly with Erma, and to tell the truth, he wondered much at her cheerfulness under the trying circumstances.

It was not, however, until the old couple had laid off their hats and wraps, and were seated before the cheerful fire in the old parlor, that Cousin Wally, wiping his agitated face with his bright bandana handkerchief, began:

"I know all about it! It is very considerate in you, Cousin Erma, and in you too, Cousin Barbra, not to allude to it, nor would I, only to—to do my duty by the widow and the orphan. If it hadn't been for that, I—I wouldn't have alluded to such a disagreeable subject, no, nor I wouldn't even have presumed to intrude on you at such a time."

And Cousin Wally wiped his face furiously.

"What in blazes are you talking about, Wally Lambe? Is it the claim this man Shellval has set up?" sharply demanded Miss Gunn.

"Yes, him! Oh! I do think it is the most rascally thing I ever heard of, this man coming to life again to oust the widow and the orphan from their home and their living! I do! Well, I always knew Perlemonte was a bad man, but I never believed he was such an atrocious monster as he has proved himself."

"By coming to life?" inquired Erma, with a little smile.

"Yes, ma'am! and by trying to oust you and your boy from your home! And he'll do it, he will!"

"I do not doubt it," said the lady.

"And that is what I came to talk about, Cousin Erma. If I hadn't come to talk about that I shouldn't have come near the house, much less spoken of the subject."

"But what in the deuce have you got to say about it, anyhow, Cousin Wally, and why in the mischief can't you say it?" sharply demanded Miss Gunn.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, I'm coming to it. It is this, Mrs. Wolfsohn, Cousin Erma. It is to you I speak. Will you listen to me, and—forgive me, if I make a mistake and give offense?" said Mr. Wally, turning to the young widow.

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"You could not give me offense, because you would not," said Erma gently.

"Well this is it, my dear Cousin Erma: When that man proves himself to be Gustave Perlemonte, I do beg and pray you, Cousin Erma, to come with your boy to me and Ada. We shall be in our new house by that time, and—you know I have got a fine new house built alongside of the old homestead on our land, don't you?"

"Yes, I know it; but oh! Mr. Lambe——'

"Hold on, honey. Let me talk. I confess it isn't polite to interrupt a lady, but excuse me for this once and let me talk. The house is big! It is awful big! And I and Ada will be lost in it like a pair o' mice in an empty hotel. Now, dear Cousin Erma, please do come to us and bring your boy, and live with us, and be our sister. We will have one house and one table and one purse. I know that as soon as the neighborhood hears of Perlemonte's return they will all be wanting you, everyone of them, for themselves—the Blantyres and the Morsets, and the Bibbs, and Gladdens, and all. But I spoke first, Cousin Erma. And I am nearer o' kin, too. And all I and Ada do want to complete our happiness is for you to come and be one of ourselves. Don't we, Ada? Ada, why don't you speak up, like an angel?" said Mr. Lambe, suddenly and confidently turning to his better half.

Now it was a curious phase of human nature, but it was a true one: Ada Mesh, when she was poor, plain, dependent and despised, was full of envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness to all the pretty, prosperous and honored; but now that the tables were turned, and she was wealthy, handsome, with the good looks that health, happiness and handsome dress confer—now that she was a beloved and honored wife (although, according to Miss Barbra Gunn, she had a "noodle" for a husband), now that she was a proud, prospective mother and the mistress of a manor, Mrs. Wally Lambe was willing to forgive fortune all her despiteful usage of Miss Mesh, and to be in peace and charity with all mankind; and she was more than willing, more from pride than from benevolence, to become the benefactress of Erma Wolfsohn.

She promptly responded to her husband's appeal by saying, cordially:

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"I should have spoken before, Walter, but that you yourself have said everything for both of us so much better than I could say anything for either."

"That's the way with her!" cried Cousin Wally, the tears springing to his honest eyes; "that's always the way with her. Always putting me first. Always shrinking into the background herself. Oh! that woman! What have I ever done to deserve such a woman as that? To think that of all the men in the world—all the great millionaires, all the great statesmen, all the great warriors, all the great scholars—that I, poor, humble, insignificant, unworthy Wally Lambe, should have won such a prize as that! I tell you, Cousin Erma, there are times when the very thought of it stupefies me so that I cannot understand it, and I ask myself, what have I done to deserve this woman?"

"You have made a jackass of yourself! That's what you have done!" snappishly exclaimed Miss Gunn—adding: "As for your invitation to Erma, many thanks, but it cannot be entertained for an instant. If the widow and son of Rodolph Wolfsohn leave Darkwood—and it is by no means certain that they will have to leave it; you are all very hasty in recognizing the claims of this stranger, who may prove to be an impostor, after all; but if, as I said, they have to leave Darkwood, of course they must come to me! Humph! Indeed! Where else should they go? Has not my house been the refuge of all the unlucky members of my family and of my tribe? Didn't you find sanctuary with me for years and years before that windfall of a railroad fortune came to you? And wouldn't you and your wife and your children, too, find a home with me to the end of your lives, or at least to the end of mine? And shall not Rodolph's widow and child have a home with me, if they should need it, until, until the devil gets Gustave Perlemonte, which cannot be long, for dissipated men are—thank the pigs!—very short-lived!"

Cousin Wally was preparing for a reply, when Erma's reedlike voice intervened, and she said:

"Your kindness, dear friends, leaves me without words to justly express my sense of it! But let me explain that, even if ejected from this estate, I shall not be quite destitute. I have a very considerable property in New York,

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of which Bishop Whiting is the trustee. I shall not like to touch this property unless I shall fail to get a living without it. For a particular reason that it is not necessary now to enter upon, I should like to leave that little fortune intact. Still, it is something to fall back upon. Therefore, with deepest gratitude, I—I do not decline—but reserve your kindly offered protection until I really need it."

"Well, my dear, I am glad to hear that you have other resources; but remember, if you ever should need a friend, a home, or a purse, you have only to give old Barbra Gunn a hint," said the old lady.

"I will remember, with sincere thanks," replied Erma.

"Yes, and please remember also that you have two strings to your bow, and that if anything should happen to Cousin Barbra, you have old Wally Lambe ready to go on his knees for you to come to him and his Ada."

"I will remember most gratefully. Whatever may betide me in the future, the memory of such friendship must soften every hardship and brighten every joy," said Erma, with emotion.

And other conversation was here prevented by the ringing of the tea bell.

"A cold roast canvasback duck! Who would have thought it? Oh! isn't this a jolly surprise for us, Ada?" exclaimed Cousin Wally, as he took his seat at the head of the table, and picked up knife and fork to dissect the subject before him.

"Oh! I dare say you sent and begged Mrs. Wolfsohn to provide it," replied Mrs. Ada, hitting the mark by a purely accidental shot.

"That woman!" again exclaimed Cousin Wally, laying down knife, and addressing the opposite wall upon which he stared, "that woman! Did you ever see anything like her? Her penetrating mind is like second sight! I give it up! I give it up! I never can tell how I ever happened to win her! I give it up now and forever! Miss Gunn, what part of the duck shall I give you?"

"Any part but the brains! Save the brains for yourself, for you need them!" snapped the exasperated old lady.

"The brains ain't here, I'm afraid. I know the head

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isn't!" replied Cousin Wally, simply, as in perfect good faith he stirred up with his fork the dressing on the dish.

"Then I am sorry for you. Give me a leg and hold your tongue!"

Cousin Wally meekly filled her plate and sent it up to her.

Erma declined duck, saying that she never took anything but bread and butter with her tea.

Then Cousin Wally filled his Ada's plate with the choicest tit-bits—the leg, the breast, and the liver, contenting himself with the lean neck and bony wings. But from the intense satisfaction with which he watched her plate, it was easy to see that he enjoyed every morsel she tasted.

Immediately after supper the buggy was ordered to take the two visitors home, for Mr. Wally was afraid of the night air for his Ada; and as absurd as his fidgety carefulness seemed to be, it had probably saved the frail creature from fresh attacks of illness, and by so doing had gradually restored her to health. The good man was saving the weak woman every way, morally and materially.

Now he wrapped her carefully in sable furs and put her in the buggy, and tucked the bear skins well about her, as he placed himself by her side.

But Miss Barbra Gunn, who feared no hour and no weather either for herself or others, stood in the outer door, with the night wind blowing sharply in her face, and spreading her cap borders and strings flaring behind like the sails and pennants of a ship in a gale, while she gave her last order.

"Tell them at home that I didn't expect even to stay all night, when I came this morning; but things having come to this pass, I can't leave Erma at present, so they must do without me for a few days," she said.

"Yes, Cousin Barbra," hastily replied Mr. Wally, gathering the reins in his hands to start the horse, for he was terrified by visions of diphtherias and pneumonias lying in wait in the darkness to snatch his precious treasure from him.

"Stop!" commanded Miss Gunn, in a peremptory tone.

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Cousin Wally stopped as if he had been struck with catalepsy.

"Now, listen to me! You and Ada must do the best you can to supply my place until I return, though, indeed, it would take a dozen, yes, a score, of such as you to do that! But you must do as well as you can."

"Yes, Cousin Barbra," exclaimed Mr. Wally, making a renewed effort to get away.

"Wait!" ordered Miss Gunn.

Mr. Wally waited obediently, though inwardly fretting at the delay in the cold night air, and seeing awful visions of his Ada shrouded and coffined.

"Now, Wally, I want you to see that Jehial puts new hinges on the barn door and mends the fence around the poultry yard."

"Yes, Cousin Barbra; but now I——"

"And, Ada, listen," continued Miss Gunn—ignoring the interruption of Mr. Lambe—"listen; I didn't bring a thing with me but my knitting, not expecting to stay, you know, and so you must pack a bag with some changes of underclothing, and my flannel bedgown and merino wrapper, and send them over by Peter to-night. The night air ain't going to hurt him, I reckon."

"Yes, Miss Barbra. Good-by."

"Stay!" commanded Miss Gunn.

And they stayed because they were afraid to do anything else.

"And, Wally, be sure to see that Jehial gives the Durham cow a warm mash night and morning, and don't let the young calf be exposed to the weather. Dear me! these expensive foreign cows and calves have to be taken as much care of as if they were fine ladies with little babies! And, oh! Ada, put my own comb and brush in the bag with the other things, and, yes, the ball of white yarn out of my workbasket on the top shelf of the cupboard in my room. I haven't got enough with me to finish my stocking."

"I will attend to it all, Miss Barbra. Good-night."

"Hear me out, can't you? Wally, tell Minny to look after the Cochin China and not let her go to sitting. She's bent on going to sitting, like a heathen barbarian as she is. Any civilized and enlightened hen would know better

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than to think she could raise a brood of chickens at this season of the year."

"I'll see to it, Cousin Barbra. Now, then, good——"

"And, oh, Ada! Yes! I forgot! What could have made me forget? Why, I might as well be without eyes as without specs! Or without a nose as without snuff! Put my spectacles and snuff box in the bag, also, Ada. Now, good-by, and be sure to remember."

"I'll remember, and, and try to do all you have directed, if I haven't caught my death of cold," answered the poor creature, with shivering limbs and chattering teeth that sent her companion into an agony of apprehension, as they drove off together, their small minds crowded with a hopeless confusion of orders concerning bedgowns, barn doors, combs and brushes, Cochin Chinas, snuff boxes, balls of yarn, cows and calves, spectacles, broken fences and warm mashes.

Miss Barbra, not a bit the worse for her own airing in the winter wind, turned into the house and shut the door, carefully locking and bolting it.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT BRIGHTHOME AGAIN.

Oh, bright is that home when the spring-time returns,
And brighter than all when the evening fire burns,
When snow falls around us and comfort within
Tell the time when the pleasures of winter begin.—ELLIS.

Miss Barbra Gunn remained on guard over Erma and her child.

Mr. Gladden came every day to inquire after or to comfort her.

Other neighbors and friends called in the course of the week, with sincere expressions of sympathy and friendly offers of service.

Erma gratefully accepted the first and as gratefully declined the last.

Erma had made up her mind that if she was to be driven from Darkwood, she must be independent and work for her own and her child's support by accepting the proposal of Mr. Gladden and returning to Brighthome as the salaried governess of little Fance.

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And, as the weeks passed, it became evident to the most incredulous of Erma's friends that the new claimant of her estate was none other than he assumed to be—Gustave Perlemonte, owner of a life interest in Darkwood, and armed with legal power to eject her and her child from the premises.

They were all daily expecting that the writ of ejectment would be served which should drive her and her child from their home.

Yet the days went by without bringing any further hostile movement on the part of Gustave Perlemonte.

Quite the contrary, indeed.

For, after the first week of absence and silence on his part and anxiety and suspense on hers, he began to write to her, to ply her with letters, deploring his offense against her, professing penitence, praying for pardon and offering atonement.

The atonement offered was, in fact, a compromise which she could not possibly accept—being a proposed marriage, and, of course, a fresh cause of offense.

At first she received them without answering, and afterwards she returned them without opening.

His next move was to waylay her as she went to church—to ride up to the side of her little one-horse carriage and beg and implore an interview.

But she lowered her thick, black crape veil, and sat back in her seat without vouchsafing him a word or a glance, although he never left her side until she reached Ice Cliff, and took refuge in the sanctuary.

At the end of the service he was waiting for her without, and attended her all the way, still imploring her pardon, professing his affection, and pleading for a hearing.

But she answered him neither by look or word, though he rode by her side until she reached the haven of her home and the protection of Miss Gunn, who had been kept indoors by a twinge of her old complaint—rheumatism.

After this, Erma never ventured abroad without the company of Miss Barbra Gunn.

There could be no doubt that the wretched man was the victim of a wild and ever-growing passion for the fair young widow.

If "perseverance commands success," as we used to be

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taught in our copybook texts, then this languishing lover was very ill used, for he did practice that virtue, but without its reward—success. Having received no encouragement through writing to her, or through waylaying her, he resorted to other tactics, and tried to reach her through those whom he called her sensible, prudent, worldly-wise friends.

He went to Gen. Bibb and made, or professed to make, a clean breast of it. But, at the same time, he set up a seemingly frank and plausible defense of himself.

He owned that he had acted in a disingenuous manner in coming down to the neighborhood in disguise and entering Mrs. Wolfsohn's service under a false name; but then he pleaded that his motive was a proper one; that he wished, while still unrecognized, to see for himself how the affairs of the plantation were managed while in the hands of this inexperienced and very youthful widow. If everything had been going on right, it was his intention to leave the neighborhood quietly, without declaring his identity, and to leave Rodolph Wolfsohn's widow and child in possession; but he found that affairs were not going on well, and that the property was dropping to destruction for want of care. So, still keeping his incognito, he engaged service with the young widow as her farm manager and bailiff, to give himself more time for observation and reflection before he should finally decide whether to go away unrecognized and leave her in possession, or whether he should declare his identity and claim his rights.

But, ah! he went on to explain, that before many days of this experiment had passed he had learned to love Erma Wolfsohn with a love that must be life or death to him.

Here the blunt old soldier, Curiatio Bibb, lifted his eyebrows in astonishment. He, Curry Bibb, was a widower but a few years older than Gustave Perlemonte, but would no more have deemed it possible for himself to fall headlong in love with any young woman than to cut his stomach teeth over again, or to go through any other trouble of infantile experience.

"I knew," said the veteran, in his straightforward way, "I knew, or, rather, I had heard, that you wished to marry

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Mrs. Wolfsohn, but I thought you regarded such a marriage as a measure of convenience and expediency. I had not an idea that there was any such thing as 'puppy love' in the case at your age. When men have passed their sixtieth year, as you and I have, they have generally done with such juvenile disorders."

Perlemonte winced and drew himself up. He was still a very fine looking man, and he knew it, and he was in love, and he knew that, also, to his cost.

"I have not passed my sixtieth year," he said, throwing back his stately head and broad shoulders.

"Well, comrade, perhaps not! But you are so near my time of life that when I die of old age you may quake for fear of death!" replied the old soldier, with a slight smile and slighter shrug.

"I am talking seriously to you, Gen. Bibb! I come to you for advice and assistance."

"Well, neighbor, if the lovely widow has turned your venerable gray head, I am sorry for you! But, really, I cannot help you!"

"But, Gen. Bibb, put it upon the ground of your own first supposition. Put it upon the ground of convenience and expediency, it would be a good thing for both of us! For all of us! For me, for Erma and for her child! I should secure the woman I love. And she and the child would secure a home as long as I should live, and enter into full possession of it after my death. So that, you see, they need not leave Darkwood at all."

"Have you made this proposal to Mrs. Wolfsohn?" coldly inquired the general.

"Yes, sir. But she met my friendly offer, my devoted offer, by which I laid myself and all I possessed at her feet—she met it, as she would have met an intentional insult—with scorn and contempt."

"Humph!" exclaimed the old soldier, raising himself on tiptoes, as he stood upon his rug with his hands clasped behind him, and his back to the fire.

"Humph" was a very non-committal interjection.

"Then, general, I confess to you that I lost temper and self-control, and behaved in a way that I shall never cease to deplore."

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"I heard something of that, but hoped it was merely servants' exaggerated stories."

"Doubtless the tale had grown before it reached your ears. Yes, doubtless it must have been exaggerated," said Perlemonte, hastening to smooth over his offense while pretending frankly to confess it. "But it was bad enough in its reality; Mrs. Wolfsohn has refused to see me, or to hold any communication in writing with me. I am reduced to despair. I do not see my way through this trouble unless you can help me."

"I am very sorry for you, but, really, I can do nothing in the case," said Gen. Bibb.

"Oh, my old friend, pray do not say that. You can do much. If you, who are a near neighbor, an intimate friend, and, indeed, a family connection, would go to her and lay my offer before her yourself, and represent to her the advantages of this marriage in a conventional point of view, and win her consent to grant me an interview, and permit me to plead my own cause, you would be doing me a great service. Can you do this for me, Gen. Bibb?"

"No, sir. Decidedly not! Were I to go to that lady on any such mission I should forfeit all right to be considered as her friend, or even as her acquaintance," said the old soldier, with such absolute firmness and decision in voice and look as to close that subject forever, and make it impossible for Perlemonte to reopen it.

With this repulse, Perlemonte retired from the presence of the general.

But he was too insane on the subject of the beautiful widow to give up his pursuit of her even yet.

He next tried to influence Dr. Dutton to see Mrs. Wolfsohn in his behalf. But the worthy physician only shook his head and declined to interfere.

Lastly, on learning that Miss Barbra Gunn had gone home to The Marsh for one day's inspection of the farm, and had left Mr. Gladden and little Fance on guard at Darkwood, he determined to brave the lionness in her lair, and see Miss Barbra herself, and try to prevail on her to take up his cause.

"I know her of old. Her roar is a great deal worse than her fangs. I will explain everything to her. She is a sensible woman, at least, and she will see the great ad-

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vantages of this proposed marriage to Erma and her child, both of whom will be quite destitute after leaving Darkwood, for all that I can see."

So, screwing his courage to the sticking place, he went to The Marsh and boldly demanded to see Miss Gunn.

Now, it happened to be Miss Barbra's whim to give him the interview. So she had him shown into the best parlor of the new house, and went downstairs to see him.

She received him very stiffly, asked him to take a seat and let her know in as few words as possible what business had brought him to The Marsh.

Then he sat down and explained his errand by telling the very same story that he had told to the general and the doctor, and he ended by making the same request of her that he had made of them.

Miss Barbra Gunn kept her wrath bottled up until he had finished, and even for a few minutes afterwards; but then the cork flew out.

"Have you done?" she inquired, when he had ceased to speak.

"Yes, madam," replied Perlemonte.

"Quite done?"

"Quite."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure."

"Well, now, Gustave Perlemonte, I have heard you through, and I have had a hard time to keep my hands off you! I wouldn't hurt any man without warning him. But now get right straight up and walk right straight out of that door! And if ever you dare to show your face on this land again—I'll scald you!"

Gustave Perlemonte sprang to his feet in high wrath.

"You and your friends do Erma Wolfsohn no good by your brutal conduct, and so you shall soon see!" he exclaimed, as he caught up his hat and strode from the room.

"Here! Jehial! Peter! Here! Set the dogs on this vagabond and hunt him off the plantation!" cried Miss Barbra.

But Perlemonte had already made good his escape, and no one thought it necessary to take Miss Gunn's words in their literal sense.

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Thus contemptuously snubbed on all sides, Perlemonte's temper grew very bitter.

His impulse was to have the writ of ejectment served at once. But then, with the fatuity of such a passion or hallucination, he determined to renew his efforts by letter to get an interview.

He recommenced the paper siege of Darkwood, bombarding it with letters, day after day; but as every one of these were returned to him unopened, he at length gave up the fruitless struggle, and his ardent love gave place to malignity and desire for revenge.

If Erma would not make him happy, it would be some satisfaction for him to make her wretched.

He took the necessary steps to have the writ of ejectment served.

Meanwhile, Erma awaited tranquilly the "crack of doom."

In the endearing presence of her little Rodolph and in the bracing society of Miss Barbra Gunn, she could not be very miserable, especially as through all the uncertainty, anxiety and suspense of her situation, she was conscious of a great stream of comfort from the fact that Otho Herne was now proved to be no murderer. The startling event—the unexpected reappearance of Gustave Perlemonte, so long supposed to have been murdered by Otho Herne—if it brought her poverty on the one hand, brought her peace on the other. Now that the first turmoil and excitement of the surprise and fear had had time to subside, she appreciated this new condition of things so keenly, that she would not have had them changed on any account. She had come to thank Heaven devoutly that Perlemonte lived, even though his life condemned her and her child to long years of poverty and exile from their home and livelihood, since it also freed him—Otho Herne—from the charge of bloodguiltiness, and left him at liberty to return from banishment and hold up his head again among his fellowmen.

Oh! how much more than mere poverty would she have borne to secure this priceless good to him!

Therefore did Erma Wolfsohn so cheerfully accept her lot of poverty and toil.

But where now was Otho Herne?

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She had not heard a word from him since that little mysterious note of the winter previous, in which he had wished her a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

She had written to Bishop Whiting, telling him of the sudden reappearance of Gustave Perlemonte, and his complete recognition and identification by the whole neighborhood. And she had sent him copies of the county papers in which his reappearance was discussed.

She had urged her old friend to take such steps as his better judgment might deem proper to vindicate the name and fame of Otho Herne, to have full justice accorded to him, and to discover, if possible, his present place of abode, or city of refuge.

And so, for the present, she had left the matter in Bishop Whiting's able hands.

And, having done all that was possible in the case, she sat down and waited.

It was on a splendid day in early March that the blow fell.

It was on Wednesday morning, and Erma and Miss Barbra Gunn, sitting together in the cozy old parlor, were particularly happy—yes, notwithstanding Gustave Perlemonte and his claim—for a good reason, that shall be explained presently, they were very happy.

CHAPTER IX.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

Oh, heaven of bliss, when the heart overflows
With the glad love only a mother knows. —ANON.

It was little Rodolph's birthday. He was one year old that day.

All the kindly neighbors knew it, and in tender sympathy for the young widowed mother and her orphan boy, both so soon to be turned adrift from house and home, they had sent in all manner of offerings of fruit, cake, candy, toys and picture books.

Early in the morning Erma had dressed Rody beautifully in a white cashmere slip, embroidered by her own deft fingers, with forget-me-nots in their natural colors.

Soon after breakfast, little Fance Fleetwood had ar-

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rived in charge of her dear "daddy," who also brought in the buggy with them a rocking horse of the size to suit the baby boy, as an offering from himself, and a tiny hand-organ, which even infant hands could turn to bring out simple melodies, as a love gift from the little girl.

Having deposited the little maiden, the hobby horse and the handorgan, and shaken hands with the two ladies and kissed the small hero of the day, Mr. Gladden thankfully declined Mrs. Wolfsohn's invitation to dinner and went away, leaving Fance to stay and play with Rodolph all day, and until he himself should come to fetch her home in the evening.

When the old gentleman was gone, the two ladies and the two children were left in the old parlor, which had never looked more comfortable and attractive than on this day.

The window shutters were all opened, and the faded yellow moreen curtains drawn aside to let in a flood of spring sunshine.

Early violets, snowdrops and crocuses, gathered from sunny nooks at the foot of the garden where it was washed by the river, bloomed in saucers set on the window sills and mantel shelf.

A fine, clear, flaming fire lighted up the glowing red hearth and the top of the brass fender that had been placed before it for the safety of the children.

But the crowning glory of the room was the lavish exhibition of birthday presents. Tables, stands and carpet were strewn with them.

Fance and Rody went from one object to another, and from one group to another, in the utmost "embarrassment of riches," not knowing what to admire most, and uttering exclamations or screams of delight, while the two ladies watched them with amusement and pleasure, growing happy in their happiness.

"How beautiful it is to observe Fance!" murmured Erma, looking fondly on the little girl. "See, she rejoices in all Rody's pretty presents as if they were her own. She does not seem to know the feeling of envy, or covetousness! But, then, she never did! The child seems to be perfectly free from selfishness."

"Yes, I notice," answered Miss Gunn, very gravely.

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"I have often noticed it in that child. And—I don't quite like it. It makes me feel uncomfortable."

"But—why?" inquired Erma, in some surprise.

"Because she hasn't selfishness enough for self-defense, hardly self-consciousness enough for self-preservation. Such children are not fit to grow up in this world, and they don't do it. I don't know what they are sent here for; but it is not to stay!" said the old lady, solemnly.

"Oh, Miss Barbra, don't say anything like that! Don't Besides, it isn't true! It is an idle superstition, excusable only in the ignorant old negro nurses," said Erma, smiling in defiance.

"The 'ignorant old negro nurses,' as you call them, having no book learning to distract their attention, are very accurate observers of life. They speak from experience."

"Oh, but look at the child, Miss Barbra! How full of life and joy she is! The perfect incarnation of health and happiness!"

"Um, I know. But see how all her individuality goes out and loses itself in that other little life before her. She is not conscious of her own existence. At this moment she is only conscious of Rody's. Rody's birthday, presents, delight, is all she feels and thinks of now. I tell you such a child lacks the natural, robust selfishness that tends to longevity."

"It—may—be—so," said Erma, slowly and thoughtfully; "yet I would not ask long life for myself or anyone else on such conditions—of eternal death at the end of it; for that, it seems to me, must be the fate of a soul steeped to the lips in self-love."

"Now there you go, Erma, flying off at a tangent to the opposite extreme of what I said. I talk of natural selfishness that obeys the law of self-preservation, not of unnatural selfishness that invades the rights or neglects the needs of others. We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, not better. And if we do that much, it is about as much as natural, healthy human nature can accomplish. Now, this child loves her neighbor better than herself—'herself!' she has no 'self' to love. No self except the visible form we see, which is herself to us. Her living soul flows out and envelops and blesses that

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other little soul beside her. I tell you that she has more of heaven than earth, and she will not remain here."

"Perhaps so," murmured Erma, meditatively, looking at little Fance, who, at the other end of the room, was so absorbed in Rody and his presents as to be wholly unconscious of the low murmured conversation going on between the two ladies. "Perhaps so; and if it is so, there is nothing very mystical in the circumstances, either. It is harmonious cause and effect. The delicate, sensitive organization that makes her so affectionate and sympathetic may unfit her for meeting the ordinary perils of human life—even, indeed, epidemics, and extremes of heat or cold. Yet it seems very strange and sorrowful that such fine spirits should not live to grow up and grow old in this world."

"Why? You have yourself just shown that it is not 'strange,' and certainly it is not 'sorrowful' to the children. It is all gain to them. They have the crown without the cross; and as far as short-sighted human beings can see, it seems better, not only for such children, but for all connected with them, that they should be taken away in childhood."

"For Heaven's sake, why?" inquired Erma.

"Because if they grow up, their perfect unselfishness must indulge and foster the self-love of those around them, who will profane it to their own hurt. But, there! I don't want to preach a sermon on this theme, so I will stop," said Miss Barbra, as she gave her whole attention to the white lamb's-wool stocking she was knitting, and began to pick up the stitches she had inadvertently dropped.

The old lady's words had given Erma a passing shiver, from which she soon recovered.

"Old nurses' tales," she said to herself. "I have heard such often enough in my life, and I won't put any faith in them. I will watch the children at their play, and I will believe in their happy earthly future."

The children had certainly a very happy present.

Fance had opened a new treasure—a gift from Cousin Wally to the little boy, whom he was pleased to congratulate on his birthday, as his dear young nephew. It was a box of Swiss toys, carved blocks for building a city.

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Fance was now engaged in building a city on the carpet, with steepled church, towered courthouse, palaces, cottages and market places; streets with carriages, horses and people.

But as fast as Fance with patient skill could build, Rody with infant awkwardness would demolish.

At length he grew weary of masonry, and making an earthquake of his little arm, swept the city to chaos, and ordered out the military.

This last was a corporal's guard of wooden soldiers, in blazing scarlet uniforms, with a supplementary supply of harmless popguns, tin swords, gay flags, brass horns and big drum; all the injudicious but characteristic present of the old veteran soldier, Gen. Bibb.

So the army was drawn up in battle array, and flags unfurled, and swords drawn, and drums beat, and horns blown, and guns popped, to the great delight of Rody, who did not mind that the supplementary ammunition, worked by himself and his second in command, were vastly disproportioned to the Liliputian army that did nothing but stand up stiffly.

So they played at their innocent war making until dinner time.

This dinner was selected and served with a special view to the children's entertainment.

Fance and Rody ate their boiled fowl and mashed potatoes, their custard pudding and preserved peaches, from a pretty little dinner set, arranged on a little, low table, at which they sat on little, low chairs—all arranged at the side of a larger table, at which the two ladies dined.

After dinner Erma put Rody to sleep in his little cradle, and Fance put herself to sleep on the sofa, for she was still but little more than a baby, and needed her noon nap as much as he did his.

Miss Barbra Gunn fell into a doze in her big armchair, and Erma glided noiselessly about the room restoring it to order.

She collected Noah and his family, and all their four-footed and feathered fellow creatures, and put them safely back in the ark. She picked up the fallen buildings and the prostrate inhabitants of the ruined city, and packed them into their box. She sent the corporal's guard

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of soldiers back into their barracks, and hung up horns, drums, flags, swords and guns.

When everything was in order again she silently slipped from the room, and went to the kitchen to consult Aunt Minty concerning some especial delicacy to be prepared for tea, in behalf of old Mr. Gladden, who was coming that evening to take little Fance home.

Erma returned to the parlor, where soon after her entrance Master Rody awoke, and by his vociferous demonstrations waked up little Fance, who came immediately in response to his call, and Miss Gunn, who, with the self-deception of some dozers, declared that she had not been to sleep at all, and wondered how anybody else, even children, should want a nap in the daytime.

The two ladies were once more sitting opposite to each other near the cheerful fire—Miss Gunn with her knitting and Erma with her needlework, while the two children sat on the carpet with a pile of toy picture books between them, and Fance, with a brilliant page open on her knee, was trying to interest Rody in the history of "Dame Wiggins of Lee, and Her Seven Fine Cats."

But Rody refused to attend. He was tired of sitting still, and possessed a desire to practice his steps. With a baby's innocent ingratitude and prompt decision, he slapped the book out of Fance's hands, and crawled away to his mother's side, and catching hold of her gown climbed to his feet.

"He wants to try to walk, Miss Barbra. Come, let us help him," said Erma, with an indulgent smile.

Miss Gunn laid down her knitting, wheeled around her chair until she faced the mother, and then held out her arms to the child, who timidly, proudly began to take tottering steps toward her.

"There! they don't shake the earth, but they will do!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, as she caught him, held him steady a moment, and then planted him face about to totter back to his mother.

So, with much laughter and few falls, the child continued to totter the few steps backward and forward between the two ladies.

It was while they were engaged in this pleasant pastime that there was a loud knock at the hall door.

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"It is Mr. Gladden," said Erma; "but he shall not take Fance home, for all that."

Meanwhile, Septimus had gone to answer the summons, and now he came in, ushering Mr. Jones, the county constable.

Erma turned paler than before, sank down in her chair and lifted the child to her lap.

Little Fance left her picture books, and came and stood mutely beside the lady.

Miss Gunn dropped her knitting, set her spectacles on the top of her head, and rose up rampant and belligerent.

All felt that the crisis had come.

Miss Gunn was the first to speak.

"How dare you intrude upon a lady's privacy at such a time?" she severely demanded of the officer.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but I come in discharge of my duty, and a most painful duty it is," said Jones, addressing himself to Mrs. Wolfsohn.

"How dared you to let this fellow in?" fiercely demanded Miss Gunn of the frightened old negro.

"I—my young mist'ess ordered me so to do whenebber he comed," explained Septimus, as he withdrew.

"Oh, Miss Barbra, dear friend, be patient! We could not have averted this. I have been expecting this visit for days. I told my servants to show in any officer of the law who might come to see me. You bring a writ of ejectment, I suppose," she continued, turning to the constable.

"No, ma'am; not so bad as that. Only a legal notice to quit," replied the man, placing the document in her hands.

Erma opened it with trembling fingers and proceeded to read it in silence.

"Well, what does it say, my dear?" inquired Miss Gunn, who had resumed her chair, where she sat glaring

"High defiance, hate and scorn"

at the unhappy instrument of the law.

"It is a notice to quit the premises within twenty-four hours," replied Erma, more calmly than she had yet been able to speak.

"Well, and you'll do it, and shake the dust off your

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feet!" exclaimed Miss Gunn. Then turning to the distressed officer, she scornfully demanded:

"What are you waiting for, fellow? Now that you have done your dirty work, why don't you take yourself away?"

"I am going now, ma'am," shortly replied the constable. Then turning to Erma, he said, respectfully, and almost humbly: "Mrs. Wolfsohn, I am very sorry to have been charged with this most painful duty. I hope you will forgive me."

"Mr. Jones, I do not blame you in the least. This was your office, and I quite believe that it has been disagreeable to you," said Erma, kindly.

"It has, indeed, ma'am. Good-evening," replied the constable, with a bow.

"Good-evening, Mr. Jones," said the lady.

The constable left the room, and was received in the hall by Septimus, who saw him out and shut the front door after him.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME.

From this day forth a ban is on her path:
She must not set her foot within these grounds—
She must not pull a flower from these fields—
She must not enter this old mansion house.

—HOWITT.

"The sun is setting on Rody's birthday. It is setting, also, on our last day at Darkwood," murmured Erma, as she gazed from the side window to catch a glimpse of the sinking luminary. "It is setting quite clear. Well, I am glad to have passed the first anniversary of Rody's birth in his ancestral home, even though we will have to leave it to-morrow."

"You will come home with me, my dear, of course," said Miss Barbra, confidently.

"I thank you, dear friend. I thank you from a full heart. But I must go where I can earn a living for myself and child," said Erma, earnestly.

"You mean to go to Brighthome, as old Mr. Gladden's housekeeper!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, resentfully.

"Oh, no, but to take precisely the same situation that I

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filled there before my marriage—that of a resident governess."

"But, Erma, then Mrs. Fleetwood and all her children were there, and you were their teacher. Now there is no one but little Fance. She is too young to require a governess. Believe me, Erma, this is only an excuse Mr. Gladden invents to give you a home and support."

"Oh, Miss Barbra! How can you say so, when even two years ago Mr. Gladden retained Miss Mesh as Fance's governess."

"To give her a home and a support, my dear; nothing more."

"But, Miss Barbra, since Miss Mesh's marriage Mr. Gladden has been trying, through advertisements, to get another governess for Fance."

"Well," said Miss Gunn, abandoning her ground of defense, and taking another, "well, and he could not get anyone to come. No lady would take a place like that in a widower's family, where there are no other ladies."

"Not in a strange neighborhood, in a strange widower's family, I grant you; but here at home, where everybody knows old Mr. Gladden and everybody knows me, and my circumstances, surely, surely there can be no objection to my taking the situation. Do you think there can be, Miss Barbra?" inquired Erma, with such a piteous anxiety of earnestness that the old lady, after some hesitation, reluctantly replied:

"N-n-o, I suppose not. If you will be so independent and must make a living for yourself, it is the best place within your reach. No, I see no objection to it, under the circumstances."

And now came another knock at the hall door, followed by the entrance of another and more welcome visitor—Mr. Gladden—ushered in by old Septimus.

"Do not tell him anything until after tea. Let him have his tea in peace," Erma whispered hastily to Miss Barbra Gunn, as the old gentleman crossed the threshold.

"Very well," she answered, as they both arose to receive him.

Fance ran joyfully to welcome her "daddy," and Rody tottered ambitiously in the same direction, only to experience an ignominious failure by falling down on all fours

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at the feet of Mr. Gladden, who raised him in his arms, saying, with a smile:

"Never mind, my little man. We must all fall many times before we learn to walk alone."

And holding the child in his left arm he shook hands with the ladies, and patted Fance's head, and sat down in the chair that old Septimus was ostentatiously pressing upon his notice.

And there he talked merrily to the children of their pleasant play day, and to the ladies on any topic they chose to start, until the ringing of the tea bell summoned them to table.

"The children will take tea with us on this occasion," said Erma, rising.

Then they went into the dining room together, where again, by the side of the large table, the little, low table was set to please the children, who sat down to it on little, low chairs, and took their tea from a pretty Liliputian tea set.

Not until the tea party was over, and they were all gathered around the fire in the old parlor—Erma with her child upon her lap, Mr. Gladden with little Fance on his knee, and Miss Gunn with her knitting in her hands—did the young widow inform her neighbor of the notice to quit she had that afternoon received.

"Well, my dear child, it is what we have been expecting so long that I have had your rooms ready for you at Brighthome for the last two months. We will do our best, my little Fance and I, to make you happy; and if you cannot be happy, you can, at least, be at peace, as in your father's house," said Clement Gladden, gravely and kindly.

"I am to leave within twenty-four hours. That is to say, we must be out of the house before sunset to-morrow," said Erma.

"Then my carriage and a cart shall be here at any hour you may name to convey you and the child and your personal effects to Brighthome. Now, be of good cheer, and remember that Perlemonte cannot possibly keep you or your child out of Darkwood, except for the term of his natural life, which cannot, with his habits at his age, be

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a long one," said the old gentleman, as he tenderly put Fance off his knee onto her feet.

"You are not going," said Erma, regretfully, as she laid her child in the cradle beside her.

"Yes, I must not keep this little girl out too late, on such a cold night."

"But this is the last evening we shall ever have the privilege of entertaining you here."

"I know it, unless I live beyond the allotted term of three score and ten; and so I grieve to leave this pleasant fireside, at which I have often sat, boy and man, for more than half a century."

Erma's eyes filled with tears.

"There, there, I did not mean to make you sad. After to-day we shall have you at our fireside, which will be all the brighter for your presence," he added, cheerily.

"Is Cousin Erma coming to stay with us, daddy?" inquired Fance.

"Yes, darling, and little Rody, too."

"Oh-h-h! won't that be just—heavenly!" exclaimed Fance, her eyes sparkling with joy.

"We will do our best to make it so, my darling. Now go and put on your wraps. I hear George stamping and pawing with impatience outside. We must not keep him in the cold."

"'A merciful man is merciful to his beast,'" said Miss Gunn; "but I don't think the horse can take much harm."

"George is a very kind-hearted horse himself, and we must not treat him unkindly. So I won't keep him waiting!" exclaimed Fance, as she flew away to get her bonnet and cloak, which were no farther off than the hat rack in the hall.

She soon came back equipped for her drive, and stooped and kissed her little playmate in the cradle, who was too fast asleep to respond, and then went in turn to Miss Gunn and Mrs. Wolfsohn, and held up her face to offer her rosy lips for their parting kiss.

Mr. Gladden shook hands with the two ladies, and led Fance out and put her in the buggy, seated himself by her side and drove away.

Miss Gunn and Mrs. Wolfsohn, who had escorted them

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to the front door, returned to the parlor and drew their chairs to the fire and sat down in silence.

Miss Gunn resumed her knitting, and knitted industriously.

Erma sat with folded hands, gazing into the fire. She could not settle herself to any kind of employment, feeling as she did that this was the last night of her stay in a house that she had become deeply attached to, as the birthplace and inheritance of her child, and that she had so long considered her home for life.

She was glad when the clock struck ten, which was the signal for her to call her servants in to evening worship.

They came in with troubled looks. Some idea of the truth had reached them, though nothing had been formally announced to them. They knew that it was now made certain, by the visit of the sheriff's officer, that their beloved young mistress and her child must leave Darkwood, but they did not know how very soon they were to depart.

They seated themselves at the table, in sorrowful gravity, to listen to the reading of the Word.

The lesson for that evening was that portion of the sublime Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord exhorts his followers to take no thought of the morrow, and illustrates the providence of God by the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

Erma felt the divine words so deeply that she read them impressively.

The lesson went home to the hearts of all who heard it, though they had listened to the same words a hundred times before.

After the brief thanksgiving and prayer, the little party separated, and retired to bed.

Erma had not given them a hint that she was to leave on the morrow.

"I could not do it, Miss Barbra," she afterward explained to Miss Gunn. "If I had done so the poor souls would not have slept a wink to-night. Let them have a good night's rest, and they will be better able to bear the blow of parting. It will be a heavy one to their affectionate hearts, come when it will."

Erma had tried to secure this night's repose to her

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servants, but she enjoyed no rest for herself. It seemed impossible for her to sleep through that long and heavy night. But she took the evening's Scripture lesson to heart, and said to herself repeatedly through the long, dark vigils:

"I will rest in the Divine Word. I will take no thought for my life. But I will thank the Lord who has provided me with this sure refuge in my trouble."

With the earliest dawn of day Erma arose from her sleepless bed, and left her child still slumbering.

She replenished her smoldering fire from the box of wood in the corner, and then dressed herself quickly, for she had a day's hard packing before her, and so she determined to begin at once.

It was not, however, until breakfast was quite over, both in the dining room and in the kitchen, that Erma called Septimus and Minty into the parlor, and told them that she had received notice to quit the premises that day, and should leave them that afternoon.

Then there was "lamentation and weeping and great mourning."

Old Septimus sat down in a chair, because he was too much overcome to stand, and he shook his gray head, and continued to shake it in perfect silence. His grief was too deep for words.

Poor Minty threw her check apron over her face, leaned up against the chimney corner, lifted up her voice and wept aloud.

It was not only that they were to leave the gentle service of the best-beloved mistress they had ever known, but they were to fall back into the absolute power of a master they feared horribly and hated—as much as the Christian religion will allow, and rather more.

The poor old creatures knew full well that as the personal property of Perlemonte's late wife they were now his own absolutely, not for his life only, but to dispose of during his life or after his death, as he should see fit. These two were the last left of the old Darkwood negroes. Perlemonte had sold all the others. And, however he might decide for them, whether to retain them in his own harsh service, or to sell them into distant slavery, their future seemed equally formidable.

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Erma tried to console her poor friends.

"Do not weep so, Aunt Minty. Think of the comforting words we read last night, and have faith," she said.

"Oh, honey, I has had faith all my life, an' see what's come to me! My chillun all sold away from me, one arter de udder! An' now, you, as has been sich a comfort to us bofe in de ole ages of our pilgrimage, to be tuk from us, too!" cried the despairing soul.

"Oh, but, Aunt Minty, we are told not only to be faithful during trials that beset us through life, but to 'be faithful unto death,' that we may receive 'the crown of life,'" said Erma.

"An' now, Airyminty, doh't you go fallin' f'om grace on dis account. I wouldn't!" said Winny Wicket, who had been sent over from Brighthome that morning to assist Mrs. Wolfsohn in her removal.

"Oh, sister Winnyfed, I ain't like you. I ain't strong in de faith like you is. I know I do fall f'om grace four-an'-twenty times a day, at least, an' can't help ob it; may de Lord forgib my weakness," replied this meek creature.

"Dat's 'cause yer gives in to de debbil. Now, I nebber does! I won't fall f'om grace on no account!" exclaimed the self-righteous teacher.

"Come, Aunt Minty, and help me to pack," said Erma, partly to take the irritating old woman off poor Minty.

"Yes, honey. An' you, ole Sept! Don't you sit there rollin' ob your ole gray head f'om one side to de udder like an ole idiwit! Get up an' make yerse'f useful!" cried Winny Wicket, decisively.

"An' I'll go make a frisky chicken for de airly dinner. Maybe she'll eat dat. She didn't eat no b'eakfas'," said Minty to herself, as she wiped her eyes and slipped away to the kitchen.

By noon that day all Erma's personal effects were packed and ready for removal.

An hour afterwards the early dinner was served, at which Miss Gunn and Mrs. Wolfsohn sat down without appetite.

"Miss Barbra," said Erma, pleadingly, "please tell me, am I right in taking this situation at Brighthome?"

"Well, I think it is rather late in the day for you to ask

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me that, Erma. You have no idea of retreating from your engagement now, I suppose?"

"No, none at all; but still, it would be a comfort to me to hear you say that I am right."

"Humph! humph! I thought that was what you meant. Well, then, Erma, put your considering cap on and think —which of the Ten Commandments do you break in taking this situation?"

"Why—none of them," answered the younger lady, promptly.

"Very well, then, my dear. You are right to take the situation. If you keep the Ten Commandments, Erma, you will do well. And they are not hard to keep. The law of the Lord is not oppressive. Keep the commandments, and trust in the Lord, and do as you please."

"I will!" exclaimed the young widow, who felt quite braced up by the trenchant independence of Miss Barbra Gunn's words.

Early in the afternoon the carriage and the cart came from Brighthome for Erma and her belongings. Jugurtha drove the carriage, and Aquilo the cart. These two, with the help of old Septimus, piled Mrs. Wolfsohn's trunks and boxes on the cart.

When this was done the parting hour had indeed come.

Erma took an affectionate leave of her two old servants, who were completely overcome with grief at her departure—Minty manifesting hers with loud weeping, and Septimus by solemn and continued shaking of his gray head.

At last the carriage containing Erma and her child rolled away, followed by the cart piled up with trunks and boxes.

Miss Barbra Gunn, who had sturdily waited to see Erma safely away, now turned to the old serving man and said, snappishly:

"Septimus, stop shaking your fool's head like a toy mandarin, and go harness up Henry to the little carriage, and take me home. Minty, stop that howling, and go and bring down my carpet bag and bonnet and shawl, and don't forget my gloves and veil and parasol—no, nor my rubber overshoes. Do you hear?"

"Yes—boo-hoo!—Miss Barbra—hoo!" answered Min-

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ty, between her sobs, as she entered the house, and went upstairs.

Miss Gunn went into the parlor, and sat down before the fire to wait, and to meditate on the vicissitudes of human life as exemplified in her own experience. She drew her ready knitting from her pocket, and went to work; for Miss Gunn never willingly lost a minute.

Half an hour later she was seated in the little one-horse carriage, driven by Septimus, on her way to The Marsh, where she arrived in due time.

Here she found unexpected company.

Mrs. Blantyre had come over to take tea and spend the evening.

"I could not stay home!" exclaimed Susan Blantyre, rushing to meet Miss Barbra and following the old lady to the latter's own room; "I could not, indeed! I was so excited by the joyful news that I have received to-day!"

"What is it?" asked Miss Barbra. "But shut the door after you, my dear. It is Greenland out there!"

Mrs. Blantyre closed the door, and then the two ladies were alone in Miss Gunn's comfortable room in the old house.

"Now, what fine news have you received?" inquired Miss Barbra.

"Oh, some from the seat of war and some from Washington. Russ writes to me that there has been an armistice since the middle of February, and that the war is virtually over. They expect that peace will soon be proclaimed and the army ordered home. Isn't that glorious news? Before midsummer we shall welcome our soldiers back."

"Humph! What's left of them!" exclaimed Miss Gunn.

Susan Blantyre's bright face instantly clouded over.

"Well, and what is your news from Washington?" inquired Miss Barbra, as she sat down in her own large arm-chair, and took off her bonnet and laid it on the bed beside her.

"Oh, that came in the Washington papers! The Senate has ratified the treaty of peace! So now we are sure it is all right, and our dear ones will soon be back."

"What is left of them," solemnly repeated Miss Gunn.

"Oh! I know! I know! I have not forgotten! Oh,

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poor Erma! While we are all rejoicing over the return of our own, how she will mourn the fate of her husband. Oh, poor Erma! How did you leave her, Miss Barbra? Did the birthday fête pass pleasantly? Did little Rody like his presents? But of course he did, and of course his birthday was a happy one, for him at least! Are you going back to stay with her, Miss Barbra, or are you going to send some one else? If some one else instead of yourself, let it be me. I will go to her willingly," said kind Susan Blantyre, with earnest sympathy.

"No need for anyone to go now!" bitterly exclaimed Miss Gunn. "You asked me how I left Erma? Well, I left her turned out of house and home by that scapegallows Perlemonte—as we might have expected."

"No!" exclaimed Susan Blantyre, in a shocked tone.

"Yes, I say."

"Oh! where is she now? Why did not you bring her home with you, Miss Barbra? Oh send her to me? I should have given her a warm welcome. Oh! where has she gone?" anxiously demanded Mrs. Blantyre.

"She has gone where she preferred to go. She has gone to Brighthome to be the governess of Mr. Gladden's adopted child, your little daughter Fance. She preferred to work for her own living, and be independent, you know."

"Oh, the goodness of Uncle Clement! There never was a man like him!"

"Yes; but, Susan, I feel very uncomfortable about it."

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid people will talk."

"Why should they talk? Is it not right that Erma should go there?"

"Perfectly right; but that won't stop people's tongues."

"Then I should pay no attention to people's tongues."

"And another consideration troubles me."

"And what is that?"

"The thought that if Rodolph Wolfsohn from the other world could see what goes on in this, and see his widow occupying a subservient situation in another man's house, how indignant he would be. And in a widower's house, how scandalized and humiliated he would be! Why, you know how bitterly Rodolph always disapproved of any

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young woman entering any house under such circumstances, either as housekeeper or governess. He never could be made to believe in the integrity of any such woman. And, indeed, there are hundreds of people who think exactly as Rodolph does on this subject."

"Hum! Does Erma think of this?"

"She does not know anything about it. I do suppose she never heard Rodolph express his opinion on the subject. Remember how short a time they were married before he left for the war."

"True! Well, his opinion is of little moment now, poor fellow. And yet——"

"What?"

"I—have a secret—that—I wish I was at liberty to tell you," said Susan Blantyre, slowly.

"A secret? Oh, come now! You had just as well tell it first as last, for you know you are dying to do so, and could not keep it to the bitter end to save your life! So out with it!" said Miss Gunn, sarcastically.

"But, Miss Barbra, this is a very momentous secret!"

"So much the more reason why you should be quickly relieved of it!"

"To be sure, I was not forbidden to tell you."

"Then why don't you do it, and have done with it?"

"But if I tell you, it will be in the greatest confidence. You must promise not to divulge it to anyone."

"Oh, look here, my dear. If you can't keep the secret, how can you expect me to do it?" chuckled Miss Gunn.

"Yet I feel that you will keep it from Erma, at least, without a promise. Well, here it is, then. There is a possibility that Rodolph Wolfsohn still lives!"

"Eh!" exclaimed the old lady, starting off her chair.

"I will tell you all I know. Russell writes me, in a postscript to his last letter, that a scout has come into his camp who reports that there is a young American officer captive among the Comanches. The scout did not know his name, never having been permitted speech with him, but from the length of time he was said to have been among them, and from the description of his person, Russell thinks it quite likely to have been Wolfsohn."

"But I thought Rodolph was massacred by those Indians?"

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"So he may have been; or he may have been captured."

"But I thought that it was certain that he had been killed."

"My dear Miss Barbra, when Russell's company came upon the scene of the massacre, the bodies had been stripped and mutilated, and—the birds and the beasts of prey had been upon them. There could be no positive identification. It was all guesswork. These facts were withheld from Erma, as being too horrible to relate."

"I should think so," exclaimed Miss Gunn, with a shudder.

"Now, it is by no means certain that this young American officer, captive among the Comanches, may turn out to be Rodolph Wolfsohn. It is just barely possible. Russell intends to follow up the clew, and take steps for the captive's liberation. But he says that for the present this must be kept from the knowledge of Erma. Only think, if she were informed of it at this stage of the proceeding, what terrible suspense and anxiety she would suffer, to end, perhaps, in the most bitter disappointment. It must be kept from Erma for the present."

"Oh, yes. I quite agree with you. It must be kept from her for the present."

A sound of many footsteps and merry laughter interrupted this grave conversation, and culminated in an invasion of young nieces, who came crowding upon their Aunt Barbra with every possible demonstration of affection and joy.

CHAPTER XI.

A HAPPY HOUSEHOLD.

We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the waves of life
Kept heaving to and fro.
So silently we seemed to speak,
So slowly moved about,
As we had lent her half our powers
To eke her living out. —THOMAS HOOD.

Yes, the secret of the possibility that her husband still lived, a captive among the Comanche Indians, was kept from Erma.

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It was deemed cruel to arouse her from her state of resignation and peace, by the inspiring of a hope that must have plunged her into the keenest anxiety of suspense, and might have ended in bitter delusion and disappointment.

The opening of this spring of 1848 brought many changes.

The Mexican War was over, and the heroes were looking forward to their return home.

Cousin Wally Lambe and his wife had taken possession of their new house, and had given a party, at which all the neighbors, including even Mr. Gladden and the sad-eyed Erma, assisted.

The new railroad was built across the old bridge, and the strange new thunder of the rushing "steam horses" roused the echoes around lonely farmhouses several times a day.

Gustave Perlemonte was in "full sovereign sway and masterdom" at Darkwood. There he was "monarch of all he surveyed," but his influence extended no farther than the boundaries of his own land.

Beyond them he was a barred and a banned man. No one sought him; all shunned him. If he happened to meet a neighbor in any public place, the coldest nod was all he ever got in the way of recognition.

This enraged Gustave Perlemonte, and made him even worse than he was before. Evil is never overcome of evil or hate of hate. If his neighbors made him uncomfortable, he would make them wretched—if he could. If they humiliated him, he would injure them—if he could.

He stayed at home and studied out means of reprisal.

Mrs. Blantyre was gayly bustling at Blantyre House, making preparations to give her returning hero a welcome that should be an ovation. She would have given him a triumph, if it had been in her power to do so.

Erma and her child were living happily at Brighthome. The household consisted of the old gentleman, the youthful widow, the little child, Fance, and the baby boy, Rody.

No more heavenly home on this earth than theirs.

Erma had a pretty suite of rooms, where she spent the morning in company with the children.

The two o'clock dinner they all took together.

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In the afternoon Mr. Gladden drove out in an open carriage, Erma and the two children with him.

They always returned in good time for tea. After tea they spent the evening in the drawing room. Little Rody was put to bed at seven; but Fance was suffered to sit up two hours longer.

At ten the whole household retired.

The neighbors, lest ill-meaning people should speak evil, made it a point to invite themselves frequently to Brighthome to dinner or tea, and to invite the Brighthome family to spend days or evenings at their houses.

An atmosphere of love and peace and "heavenly benediction" pervaded the place over which old Clement Gladden presided.

Never had Erma, since the dark days of her domestic tragedy, known such a period of benign repose. But one thing marred her perfect rest. It was the thought of Otho Herne. All the advertisements on his account remained unanswered.

Where was the wanderer now? Living in some remote region where newspapers could not reach him, or—dead on some foreign shore?

She could not even surmise his fate, and she longed for certainty.

This was the only source of her uneasiness. In all other respects she was at perfect peace.

The first rude break in her repose came in this way.

One morning early in May, old Aunt Minty, from Darkwood, came up to Brighthome, inquiring for Mrs. Wolfsohn.

Erma sent word that she must come up to her room at once.

Erma had not seen old Minty since they parted at Darkwood, nearly two months before, and so their meeting was more like one between mother and child than between mistress and servant.

Minty courtesied, and would, in her humility, have continued to courtesy for Heaven knows how long, had not Erma taken her hand and led her to an easy-chair, and set her down in it, and sent little Fance, nothing loath, to bring the old woman a glass of cherry bounce and a slice of pound cake.

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"Now, what is it, Aunt Minty? You look so troubled," inquired Erma, sympathetically.

"Oh! my mist'ess, sich cappin' sorrow to come on me, as has had sorrow enough, dear knows, a'ready! Sich a cappin' sorrow to come on me in de ole ages of my pil-g'image!" said Minty, beginning to cry.

"What is it, Aunt Minty? Is it anything I can help?" inquired Erma, taking the poor, little, withered black hand between her own and caressing it.

"Oh, my mist'ess, I dunno; but it seems nat'ral to come an' 'peal to you, anyways! Seem to we poor black slaves as any pusson wid a white skin can do mos' anyfing."

"I will do anything in my power, if you will tell me how I can help you," said Erma, earnestly, still holding and petting the poor, little black hand.

"Well, honey, I dunno, but it is dis here. You know, honey, I telled you how when my ole Mist'ess Perlemonte died, Marse Gustave he sold all de able-bodied cullad people off de place, 'cause dey was her pussonal property when he married of her, an' as dere wa'n't no marriage settlements dey was hizzen arterward—not hizzen like de house an' lan' was, honey, for his life, but hizzen for good an' all, out an' out, to do what he pleased wid. Well, honey, he sold 'em; you know I telled you 'bout dat?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, honey, he didn't sell me an' poor Brudder Septimus, 'cause we was too ole agey to fetch much money, 'sides which I fink he might a-wanted us to stay home and take care ob de place."

"No doubt."

"But now, my mist'ess, look here. He's a-gwine to put me an' poor Sept up to be sold on de auction block o' Monday!" cried Minty, breaking down and beginning to whimper, as she took a newspaper from her pocket, unfolded it, and handed it to the lady, pointing out at the same time an advertisement at the top of the column.

"Oh, this is infamous!" indignantly exclaimed Erma, when she had read the notice, that Araminta, a healthy woman of fifty, an excellent cook and housekeeper, of good moral character, and good for twenty years' service yet; and also Septimus, aged fifty-five, a good and reliable coachman, and fit for many years' service, honest, faith-

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ful, sober, etc., etc., etc., would be sold at public auction on the market square at Ice Cliff on Monday, the eighth instant.

"Who showed you this paper, Aunt Minty?" inquired Erma.

"Brudder Jehial did, mist'ess, at class meetin', which he heerd Miss Bab Bibb read it out at breakfas' table dis morning, an' he jes' borried it from her, 'cause he thought maybe I didn't know nuffin' about it, an' I ought to, an' he knowed he would see me at class meetin' las' night."

"Minty, did you speak to Mr. Perlemonte about this?"

"Yes, mist'ess, I did, an' I went down on my knees to him, not to s'pose me in my ole age to sich. An' I said how I would do de bes' I could for him if he would keep me an' poor Sept at home."

"What did he say?"

"He laughed in my face, mist'ess, an' told me if I could find anybody fool enough to give a thousand dollars for the pair of us, me an' poor ole Sept, at private sale, he would take it. But, law, mist'ess, who's gwine to give half dat money for two poor ole creetures like me an' poor Sept? When sich as we is put up, we is gen'ally knock down for a hund'ed dollars or so, to some poor white people who wants servants, an'll take sich as we, soon an' none. You know, mist'ess, where de ole hosses go to? Well, de ole niggers goes de same road, when it is Marse Gustave Perlemonte as sends 'em."

"Oh, Aunt Minty, my heart is so grieved for you!" said Erma, as her eyes filled with tears.

"I didn't s'pose you could do anyfing for us, honey, dough it was a sort ob comfort to come an' tell you," sighed the old woman.

"But perhaps I can, Minty. At least I will try."

"I don't fink anybody can help me, honey," said the poor soul, in a tone of despair.

"Now, look here, Airyminty Abercromby, don't you go fallin' from grace on de 'count ob ole Gustave Perlemonte! I done heerd somefin' 'bout dis here auction bizness myse'f! But don't you go fallin' from grace!" cried a well-known voice.

Looking up, they saw Winny Wicket standing in the

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doorway, with a plate of cake and a glass of bounce in her hands.

"Oh, Aunt Winny! Why didn't you let little Fance bring that up?" inquired Erma.

"And let her spill de bounce all ober her white frock? Yes, I reckon so! 'Specially when I has got to wash it. But here is de 'freshments, ma'am, at your service," replied Mrs. Wicket.

"Give them to Aunt Minty. Take them, Aunt Minty. The bounce will revive you."

Winny Wicket put the plate of cake on Minty's lap, and the glass of bounce in her hand, and left the room, saying that she had to go down to stuff the ducks for dinner.

Fance came in at the same time, leading little Rody, who immediately recognized his Mammy Minty, and ran toward her.

"Now, comfort yourself with the children while I go and consult Mr. Gladden, and see what can be done for you," said Erma, as she arose and left the room.

In all her troubles and perplexities, Erma Wolfsohn went as naturally and confidingly to Clement Gladden for human help as—with deep reverence be it written—she went to her Heavenly Father for spiritual blessings.

She found the old man, wrapped in his old purple cashmere dressing gown, and reclining in his chair.

He laid down the book he had been reading as she entered, took off his spectacles, and arose and handed her a seat. Nor did he resume his own chair until she was seated.

No circumstance ever made old Clement Gladden forget the habitual courtesy of his manners.

Erma explained to him the business upon which she had sought him.

"This is what might have been expected of the man. But, of course, I will stop this infamy. The old people must not be subjected to this degradation. Tell Minty to have courage. This is Wednesday. I will go to Ice Cliff at once, and instruct my attorney to seek out Perlemonte and negotiate with him."

Erma looked at him with grateful eyes full of tears.

"May the Lord bless you!" she murmured, in low but heartfelt tones. "Yes, that is what the beggar says when

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some hand drops him a penny; yet what better can I say to you, my friend and benefactor—friend and benefactor of all humanity—what better can I say to you than this—May the Lord bless you!"

"The Lord is always blessing me, and you, and all of us, my child—blessing us most of all in opportunities of doing good! Go now, dear, and comfort your poor Minty. I am off to Ice Cliff," said Clement Gladden, rising and ringing a bell.

Erma left the study and hurried back to Minty, whom she found with little Rody on her lap and Fance at her side.

She told the good news.

"Before Saturday night, Minty, you and Septimus will both be established here, to remain with us until we all go back together to Darkwood," said Erma, cheerfully.

"Praise de Lord! An' may He bless an' prosper you an' Marse Clemmy, mist'ess!" exclaimed old Minty, as she pressed little Rody to her bosom, and then got up to go home and carry the good tidings to Septimus.

Mr. Gladden acted so promptly that on Friday night Aunt Minty and Uncle Septimus arrived bag and baggage at Brighthome, and thenceforth their heaven on earth began.

And the worthy Gustave Perlemonte, being very flush of money, got drunk every day for a month, and only stopped then at a violent attack of illness that threatened his life but did not take it.

The sale, however, had not been effected without trouble; for as soon as Gustave Perlemonte found out who was the would-be purchaser, he maliciously doubled him terms, and asked a thousand dollars each for the two poor old creatures. But the attorney, in whose hands Clement Gladden had wisely left the whole transaction of the business, was of much sterner stuff than his client. He laughed in Perlemonte's face, and told him brutally that the negotiation was at an end, and that he might put his worn-out cattle up to auction and see what they would bring, and, adding that he was engaged, begged to be excused.

Gustave Perlemonte, taking the broad hint, left the office—for this interview had taken place at the attorney's

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rooms, to which Mr. Perlemonte had been invited by a note.

Thenceforth all advances toward a compromise had come from Perlemonte, who reappeared at the lawyer's office the same afternoon, where, backing down by slow degrees from his extortionate demand, he at last consented to the terms first offered, but only on condition that the sale should be concluded and the purchase money paid down in cash within twenty-four hours.

This was agreed upon, and the result was that poor old Minty and Septimus went to their earthly heaven at Brighthome, and Gustave Perlemonte went—well, to the other place for several weeks.

Minty became the personal attendant of Mrs. Wolfsohn, and occasionally the assistant of Winny Wicket in the kitchen, where she instructed that accomplished housekeeper in the art and mystery of getting up a "frisky chicken," and other special delicacies in the preparation of which she delighted.

On the other hand, Mrs. Wicket, in the spirit of pharisaical self-righteousness, so dinned the terrors of the law and the consequences of falling from grace into the ears of the meek creature, who felt that she fell every hour in the day, as to drive her humble heart to despair, and make life a burden to her, had it not been completely counteracted by Erma's teachings of the gospel of love.

"I hears her, honey. I lets her talk, but her words go in at one ear an' out at de other. Dey don't 'sturb me any more," said Minty, patiently referring to these "dinnings" when speaking to her mistress.

This cloud did not overshadow Minty's heaven very long.

Their days passed at Brighthome in halcyon peace.

One day early in June, while Erma sat in her private apartments with the two children, she herself engaged in needlework while she watched them—little Fance in studying her geography lesson, and baby Rody playing with his alphabet blocks on the floor—old Septimus came to the door, and announced that Mrs. Blantyre and the Fleetwood children were downstairs in the parlor, asking to see Mrs Wolfsohn and the little ones.

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Erma immediately arose and left the room to go below, followed by Fance leading little Rody.

She found Susan Blantyre in a fever of excitement, too high to allow her to sit still, walking up and down the floor.

"Oh, Erma! They are on their way home! They are at St. Louis! They will be in Washington in a few days!" she exclaimed, rushing to meet her friend.

"Who? who?" inquired Erma, as she made the restless woman sit down in an easy-chair to calm herself, and then turned and greeted Fleurie and Eustace with a kiss.

"My husband's regiment, of course! Oh, Erma, and they are to remain in Washington some time before they are disbanded. I got a letter to-day. He asks me to come on and meet him in Washington. I shall go to-morrow, and take the children with me. Fance, too, if she will like to go. Come here, Fance, and speak to mamma."

The little girl, who was welcoming Fleurie and Eustace and only waiting her mother's notice to fly into her arms, now ran and was lifted to her mother's lap.

"Do you love mamma, Fance?" gravely inquired the lady.

"Oh, yes, I do love you, mamma!" affectionately responded the child, putting her arms around her mother's neck and kissing her fondly.

"She looks so white. Is she quite well, Erma?" inquired the lady, disturbed perhaps at the change in her child's complexion more than she would have been but for the impending journey.

"I think she is quite well. I noticed her want of color this morning, and asked her if she felt well, and she answered: 'Very well.' I think it is the heat of the weather, Susan."

"Very likely. Are you quite well, my darling?" inquired the lady, looking anxiously into the brilliant, radiant eyes and white face of her child.

"Yes, mamma, quite well and happy. And last night I couldn't sleep for looking at the lovely children," said the little girl, lifting her starry eyes to her mother's face.

"Children, Fance? What children?" inquired the lady, in perplexity.

"Why, don't you know? Don't you ever see them? I

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mean the beautiful children that always come around everybody's bed just as they are falling to sleep, you know!"

"They don't come around mine," said Mrs. Blantyre, in perplexity.

"Don't they? I thought they did. They always come to me, and I like them. Only last night, oh! so many came, and they changed everything, and my room looked like a beautiful garden. So I could not sleep for ever so long, for looking at the lovely children and the flowers," said Fance.

"It was a beautiful dream, my darling," replied her mother.

"Oh, but I was wide awake, ever so wide awake! Wider awake than I am now."

"You dreamt that you were. It was a part of your dream, my pet."

"And the lovely children! And the garden and the flowers! Only a dream!"

"Only a dream, my dearest child."

"And every time the lovely children came, was it only a dream? Every time?"

"Every time, Fance."

"I am so sorry, because I thought it was really so," said the little girl, with a sigh.

"And you have seen these visions—I mean, you have had these dreams—how long, Fance?"

"Always," answered the child, raising her starry eyes in wonder to her mother's face. "I thought everybody had!"

"But you never told me about them before."

"Didn't I? Well, I—didn't think of it, I reckon. But I told daddy, sometimes."

"What did he say?"

"He told me to be a good and loving child, and then, whether I stayed here a hundred years, or went away very soon, I would be with the lovely children in the Lord's garden."

"Oh, Erma," said Mrs. Blantyre, piteously, "do try to interest this child in the natural pursuits of childhood—in dolls and doll houses and Noah's arks, and such."

"I assure you," replied Erma, "she does not lack inter-

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est in all these things. She thoroughly enjoys her child life—no child more so—few children as much."

"Where is Uncle Clement?" inquired Susan Blantyre.

"Taking a walk of inspection among his people's homes to see what they need in the way of repairs and furniture. He will be in to dinner. I suppose you will stay?"

"Of course, but I must go away immediately afterwards. And oh! here comes Uncle Clement at last."

Mr. Gladden entered the room and cordially greeted Mrs. Blantyre and her children, and sat down among them, wiping his moist brow and bald crown with his pocket handkerchief.

Susan Blantyre, with some accession of excitement at the recurrence of the topic, told him of the movements of the home-coming troops and of her intention to go to Washington to meet her husband there.

"I shall take the children with me," said Mrs. Blantyre, tightening her hold upon her youngest, who was still on her lap.

"And Fance too?" inquired Mr. Gladden.

"If you please. I think the change will do her good. She is not looking well."

"I want to stay with daddy," said the child, in a pleading tone.

"Well, my darling, so you shall, if you wish to do so. No one shall force you to go, merely because you are a gentle little thing, too helpless to resist," said Susan Blantyre, caressing the child more tenderly than she had ever been known to do "But won't you go of your own free will this once with poor mamma?"

Fance looked up at the fresh, blooming face of her beautiful mother, and then across the room on the pale, gray visage of her old daddy, and kept silence.

"Say, won't you go with poor mamma?"

"I want to stay with poor daddy. Flurry and Rooster can go with you," said the child.

"But don't you love poor mamma, Fance?"

"Yes, I love you," said the little girl, throwing her arms around the lady's neck and kissing her fondly. "I do love you dearly, but I want to stay with poor daddy."

"It is no use, Mr. Gladden. You have stolen the child's

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heart away from her own mother," said Mrs. Blantyre, somewhat resentfully.

"I hope not, Susan. I believe not. I never intended it. You are her mother, and have the best right to her. If you think proper, you must take her from me. She is but a child and her tears for her 'daddy' will soon be dried. As for me, my intentions toward her should not be affected by her change of residence. She is my heiress under all circumstances," said Mr. Gladden, deprecatingly.

The "soft answer" had turned "away wrath."

"Forgive me, Uncle Clement. I was a mean, jealous wretch, and said what I did not believe. Besides, I would not break the child's heart by taking her from you. Look at her face now at the very mention of such a thing," said Susan Blantyre, pointing to the white cheeks, tearful eyes and quivering lips of the little girl. "No, my darling," she continued, caressing the little creature; "you shall not be forced to anything merely because you are small and weak. I will treat you, at least, with as much justice as I would show to a grown person. Uncle Clement, two years ago we agreed that the choice of the child should decide her own residence. She has chosen to stay with you. She shall stay. The question need never be reopened as long as you live," said Susan Blantyre.

"So be it, my dear. You shall not regret the trust you confide to me," answered the old gentleman.

The dinner bell had rung some little time before, but, in the earnestness of their conversation, they had disregarded the summons.

Now, however, Erma gently reminded her guest of the fact, and invited her to go into the parlor chamber to lay off her bonnet.

"I will lay it off here, my dear, for I shall have to leave directly after dinner," said Susan Blantyre, carelessly throwing the little structure of white lace and flowers that she called her bonnet onto a side table, and standing prepared to go to the dining room.

The whole party dined together, even little Rody sitting at his mother's right hand in a three-storied high chair.

After dinner, while they sat in the parlor for a few minutes, waiting for the horses to be put to the carriage, Mrs.

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Blantyre took little Fance upon her lap, and looking into her wee, wistful face, inquired:

"So you do not want to go with poor mamma?"

"No. Flurry and Rooster will go with you. I will stay with poor daddy," said Fance.

"Well, what shall I bring my little girl from the big city?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, but you must say something. Shall I bring you a splendid new doll?"

"It would hurt my poor old dolly's feelings if I was to go and love a splendid new doll."

"Well, then, what shall I bring you?"

"I don't know," answered the child, a little stupidly for her.

"Wouldn't you like a beautiful new white muslin dress, trimmed with Valenciennes lace and blue ribbons, and blue slippers, and blue beads to match?"

"Oh, yes! yes! how pretty that will be!" exclaimed the child, brightening up, for she was fond of all beautiful things, and very fond of beautiful dresses.

"Mamma will be sure to bring you one."

"And I may wear it to church?"

"Yes, you may wear it to church," said the lady, fondly pressing her child again and again and again to her bosom, and kissing her many times before she put her down to leave the house, for the carriage was now ready and waiting.

Mrs. Blantyre and her two elder children took leave and departed, Susan whispering at the very last to Erma:

"I cannot account for the heaviness of heart with which I leave Fance. Oh! my dear friend, take care of my little darling while I am gone."

"I will take more care of her than if she was my own," answered Erma.

And with this promise they parted.

It was now near sunset, and the little family sat out on the porch watching the carriage as it wound around the home drive toward the turnpike road leading to Blantyre House.

All were seated except Fance, who had climbed upon

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the porch bench, and stood with her arm around the post, gazing after the carriage as long as she could see it.

Long, long afterward Erma remembered the picture that the child made as she stood there—her slender little figure clothed in its white cambric dress, her long, pale, golden-hued hair streaming down in "ghastly contrast" to the white cheek.

Fance watched the carriage out of sight, and still gazing after its disappearance, inquired:

"When is mamma coming back, Cousin Erma?"

"In about two or three weeks, dear. She will not be gone long," said the lady.

The child got down from her perch, and sighed:

"A day is long, and a week is very, very long."

They stayed out until the dew began to fall, and then went in to their early tea.

After tea, when they were again reassembled in the parlor, Mr. Gladden resting in his armchair, Erma with little Rody on her knee, Fance came to the old gentleman, and said:

"Take me up, please, daddy! I am so tired."

Mr. Gladden took her up tenderly and pillowed her golden head and white cheek upon his bosom, where she soon fell asleep.

"I fear she is not quite well," said the old man, gazing down on the golden-fringed, white eyelids that only half covered the blue orbs beneath. "Children never sleep with their eyes half open when they are in health."

"She did not rest well last night. She dreamed too vividly," replied Erma.

"And that is no sign of health. I must see Dutton tomorrow," said Mr. Gladden, gravely; and he patiently held Fance in his arms until her usual bedtime, when he carried her upstairs himself, and laid her in the bed, telling Hinda to steal the clothes off her so gently as not to awaken her.

The next morning Fance seemed all right again, and soon after breakfast she was delighted with a visit from Marc Antony, of Blantyre House, who had driven his mistress and her two elder children over to Ice Cliff to take the stage-coach for their northern journey, and had called at Brighthome on his way home, to deliver a part-

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ing message from his mistress to Mrs. Wolfsohn, imploring her to take care of little Fance, and also to deliver a parting present from her mother to little Fance—a doll's open carriage, "to give her poor old dolly an airing every day."

"And now I can ride my poor, sick dolly out, and it will do her good," said the child, exultingly.

And all that morning, at her studies, or at her play, she seemed quite well, and Mr. Gladden smiled at his yesterday's idea of sending for a doctor to her.

But after tea that day Fance came to him again, and said:

"Take me up and hold me tight, dear daddy. I am so tired—so tired inside of myself."

Again he took her up and gathered her to his bosom, and held her till she went to sleep, and still held her until her bedtime, when, as on the previous evening, he carried her upstairs in his arms and laid her on the bed, with careful directions to Hinda not to awaken her while undressing her.

"And now I shall have Dutton here, no matter how well she may seem to be in the morning," said Mr. Gladden to himself, as he descended to the drawing room.

Little Fance's sleeping apartment was a small room opening into Mr. Gladden's large bedchamber. It had once been the old gentleman's dressing room, but he had given it up to the little child for the sake of having her where alone she was satisfied, within call of himself. No door, but blue damask and white muslin curtains, separated the two rooms.

That night, as the old gentleman lay in his bed, sleeping the light sleep of age, he was awakened by hearing a slight noise in his room. He opened his eyes and saw a small figure in white moving slowly about through the darkness.

"Is that you, Fance?" he called.

"Yes, daddy."

"What is the matter, darling? What do you want?"

"I am looking for some water, daddy. I am so thirsty."

"Why didn't you call me to find it for you, dear?"

"'Cause I didn't want to wake you, dear daddy."

The voice was so weak, and faint, and sick, that Clem-

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ent Gladden took alarm, and instantly sat up in bed, and reached his arm for the old purple cashmere dressing gown that lay over the back of the armchair at his side.

He hastily put it on, and got up and struck a light, and looked at the child.

She was no longer white. Her cheeks were crimson, and her lips were nearly black and parched. He hastened to the mantelpiece, on which an ice pitcher had been placed at bedtime, and he poured out a glass of cold water and gave it to the child, who drank it with feverish eagerness, her little hot fingers clasping the goblet.

"Are you sick, Fance?" was his first affectionate, but unnecessary, question, which was quickly amended by his next: "Where are you sick, Fance?"

"In my head," answered the child, in a weary and exhausted voice.

He took the goblet from her and set it down, and then lifted her in his arms and carried her back to her little bed —but pillows, bedclothes and all were heated from her own hot fever.

He brought her into his own room again, and laid her on the outside of his own cool bed, and then went and wet a napkin in ice water, and put it on her burning head, and sat down by her to change the cloth as often as it grew warm.

"Water! water! water!" cried the child.

He gave her water, as long as he dared to do so, but fearing at length to overload the delicate stomach with too much fluid, he pounded up some ice, and when she cried for water he fed her with that.

"Ice is nice! Nice is ice! Ice is nice!" she cried, ringing the changes on those words under the excitement of fever.

Clement Gladden groaned involuntarily as he wished for daylight that he might send a servant to fetch Dr. Dutton.

The quick ears of the child caught the low sound of sorrow, and her brain and lips took up another refrain:

"My—poor—daddy! My—poor—daddy!"

And this she repeated not once or twice, but over and over again for hours without ceasing, until Mr. Gladden,

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who was still at intervals cooling her head, or feeding her with ice, cried out in his anguish of mind:

"Oh, how I wish her mother had not left her!"

That struck another vein of thought in the highly excited and half delirious brain, and the lips took up another sing-song of:

"My—dear—mamma! My—dear—mamma!" which she continued to repeat over and over again, until the red dawn of morning stole in through the window blinds.

Mr. Gladden left her for a few moments to go downstairs and send Quil on a swift horse to fetch the doctor.

Then he returned to the bedside of the child, who had taken up some other refrain and was going on with it as fast as possible.

Not for one instant was that terribly excited brain quiet or those parched lips silent.

Ah! who has not sat with breaking heart beside the deathbed of a child?

In an hour the whole family were up, and deeply interested in the case of little Fance.

Her delirium rose higher as the day advanced.

It was near noon when Dr. Dutton arrived. After visiting and examining his patient, he took Mr. Gladden aside and said:

"It is a great pity her mother left her the day before yesterday. Do you think there is any way of overtaking her?"

"Is the case as serious as that?" inquired Clement Gladden, in alarm.

"It may become so," answered the doctor, evasively, adding: "Her mother ought to be sent after and brought back, if that be possible. Do you know whether she will stop at any given point between here and Washington?"

"Yes, she will break the journey and take two days' rest at Staunton, she said."

"Then, my dear sir, put Quil on your swiftest horse, and start him off to Staunton to intercept the lady and bring her back. Tell him to ride express, and change horses at every point. Give him a pass and money to expedite his journey. He will in that way reach Staunton much sooner than he would by coach—reach there, in fact,

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about as soon as Mrs. Blantyre, although she has so much the start of him."

Mr. Gladden excused himself to the doctor, and went immediately to give the necessary orders; and so prompt was his action that within half an hour Aquilo was started on his journey.

Dr. Dutton left the house to visit a patient in the neighborhood, promising to look in again on his way home that evening.

Mr. Gladden went up to the side of his beloved little Fance, who still lay on his own large, cool bed in his spacious, airy bedchamber, where he determined she should remain during her illness.

He sat down beside her. She opened her eyes and looked at him. Her fever seemed lower; her mood calmer; she put up her little, thin hand and patted his careworn cheek and smiled.

"Are you better, my darling?" he inquired, tenderly.

"Yes—better," she answered; but the movement and the speech so exhausted her that her blue eyes closed and her chin dropped in weakness.

He put a little piece of ice between her lips, and renewed the napkin, wet with iced Florida water, on her head, and this seemed to revive her a little, and give her strength to breathe more freely.

But near evening the fever rose again and reasserted its sway with more violence than before.

All night long the child's mind wandered in delirium. She never raved. She was much too gentle to rave, even then; nor was that delirium an unhappy one. She was wandering in the beautiful gardens, and playing with the lovely children of her dreams.

"There is no conscious suffering, you see, Mr. Gladden," said Dr. Dutton, who spent the night beside her bed.

"I thank the Lord for that!" said the broken-hearted old man, bowing his gray head reverently.

Toward noon the next day her fever waned, nad she had a lucid interval of a few minutes, during which she recognized her "dear daddy," and patted his cheek, and told him she was almost well.

Ah! why dwell upon the piteous story?—the days and nights of the ebb and flow of fever?

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The doctor continued to say that there was not much conscious suffering. In high fever there was delirium, and wanderings in pleasant places, and playing with pretty children or pet animals; in the intermission of the fever there was great prostration, with feeble, affectionate recognition of friends.

Always, in her lucid intervals, she asked for her "daddy," if he happened for the moment to be absent from her bedside, or she exerted all her waning strength to lift her hand to pat his cheek.

This always overcame him, even to tears.

And then she would look at him compassionately, and gasp faintly the words:

"Don't cry, dear daddy; I am better. I am almost well now—indeed I am."

Ay, truly. She was almost well!

CHAPTER XII.

PEACE.

Her suffering ended with the day,
Yet lived she at its close,
And breathed the long, long night away
In statue-like repose.
But when the sun, in all his state,
Illumed the Eastern skies,
She passed through glory's morning gate,
And walked in Paradise. —ALDRICH.

The last day came—a lovely summer's day.

Little Fance had lain quietly all the forenoon, watched by old Clement Gladden, who sat by her bedside, holding her small hand in his own.

She had uttered no word except, occasionally, "Ice," and ice, in small quantities, was all that she had been able to take.

Her broken-hearted watcher knew that the end was not far off now. He grew deeply anxious for the return of the child's mother, especially when, in the afternoon, the little one, turning her pathetic, soft-blue eyes up to his, and pursing her feeble, pale lips, tried to syllable a word.

Overcome with grief, he stooped to listen.

"Mamma?"

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"Yes, my darling, yes—mamma is coming," answered Clement Gladden. "And oh, may the Lord grant that she come quickly!" he added, in his thoughts.

The child lay patiently for another hour, and then grew restless, until, at length, she lifted her sad eyes eagerly, pleadingly, and murmured:

"Mamma?"

"Yes, yes, my angel, yes; mamma is coming as fast as she can," he said, laying his hand caressingly on the pale brow, where the death damps were already gathering. "Oh, why—why did she leave her child? Oh, who shall tell her, should she come too late—should she come when all is over—who shall tell her how this little one, with dying lips, called for her all the afternoon? Ah! Heaven send she may be here in time," he prayed, in his heart.

Yet another hour, and still another, the meek child lay, silently breathing her life away, ere she asked the third time, in piteous, beseeching tones:

"Mamma?"

"My precious, yes! She is here! She has come!" exclaimed the old man, as he caught the sound of carriage wheels at the door below, and knew, by some strange, swift intuition, that they had brought the mother to her dying child.

The next minute there was a muffled sound of cautious steps and half-hushed voices coming up the stairs.

Mr. Gladden stooped and whispered:

"I'll fetch mamma."

Then he slipped out of the room to meet Mrs. Blantyre.

"How—how is my child?" panted the pale, half-fainting woman, as she met the old man.

"She is easy. She is asking for you. Now, dear Susan, for Heaven's sake, control yourself. Be a woman. Do not exhibit any emotion in the child's presence. She is not strong enough to bear the least disturbance," said Clement Gladden, earnestly.

"I will try to be quiet. I will try," sobbed the poor mother, as she followed him into the chamber. She hastily untied her bonnet, unpinned her shawl, and dropped both upon the floor as she hurried across the room to the bedside of the child.

"Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling!"

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she moaned, sinking on her knees by the bed, and leaning over the little, pale face.

"My—dear—mamma!" faintly breathed the little one, as she raised her tiny hand and stroked her mother's cheek.

"Are you better? Oh, my angel, are you better?" pleaded the lady, half deceived by the sudden lighting up of the blue eyes, half hoping against hope, and praying for a favorable answer. "Are you better?"

"Yes—better," panted Fance, and the effort took away her breath for an instant.

"Are you glad to see poor mamma?" inquired Susan Blantyre, kissing the little, pallid lips, and smoothing, with her fingers, the cold, clammy brow. "Are you glad?"

"Yes—glad!" gasped Fance.

"My dear Susan, don't! You tax her feeble strength too much," anxiously whispered Mr. Gladden.

"Oh, Uncle Clement, I want to rouse her. I must rouse her! Oh, I cannot let her sink!" exclaimed Mrs. Blantyre.

Then, stooping over the child, she inquired:

"Fance! Fance! do you know what mammy promised to bring you? Do you remember?"

The little one looked puzzled and doubtful.

"A white dress, don't you know, Fance? A pretty, white dress with blue ribbons?"

"Oh—yes," answered the little girl, a gleam of childish pleasure in her eyes.

"And pretty blue slippers and blue beads?" added Susan, smiling

"Oh—yes," said the child, gasping, but smiling

"Well, mamma has brought them all to you! Every one—dress, ribbons, beads and shoes. You will wonder that I could think of such trifles at such a time, Uncle Clement; but, you see, I remembered that she had set her mind on them, and I had promised to bring them to her; so I bought them at Staunton. While the hostler was feeding and watering the horses preparatory to putting them in the chaise, I ran out and got these things."

While the lady spoke to the old gentleman, little Fance had sunk again into such perfect quietude that she seemed to notice nothing.

"Oh! I must rouse her! I must not let her sink like this! Run, Hinda! Bring my traveling bag up from the

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hall. The things are in that. I will show them to her!" exclaimed the mother, as soon as she perceived the condition of her child.

"You had better let her rest," said Mr. Gladden, earnestly.

"Oh, no! I must rouse her! I must rally her strength! Oh, I must! I must, Uncle Clement!"

"Ah!" sighed the old gentleman, "there is not strength left to rally, Susan!"

But by this time Hinda re-entered with the bag. Susan Blantyre opened it and drew forth several small parcels done up in tissue paper. Unrolling these quickly, one after the other, she produced white organdy muslin, fine as a cobweb, cerulean blue ribbons, bright as summer skies, turquoise beads and kid slippers.

"See how pretty, my darling! See how pretty," she said, displaying them all on the white counterpane.

"Yes—I see!" gasped the child.

"And feel them! There!—take them in your hands, pet," she added, putting the bright ribbons and the soft kid slippers in the little, cold, listless fingers that had no strength to hold them.

"And mamma will make the dress for you, right away, so you can wear it," continued Susan Blantyre.

But little Fance's mind was lapsing away from attention.

"Wouldn't you like to wear this pretty new dress?" persisted Susan Blantyre, still pursuing the "rousing" policy. "Wouldn't you like to have it made for you to wear to church?"

"Yes—to—church," panted Fance; but her words seemed only to echo those of her mother. Her eyes closed and her lips fell open.

"Fance! Fance! my baby!" wailed the mother.

"Let her alone. She has dropped asleep," said Mr. Gladden.

"Come, Susan! While she sleeps, come out and let me give you a cup of tea," whispered Erma, who had just entered the room.

"No, no; please Heaven, I will never leave her side again! I have left her too much! too much! Oh, my baby! If I could have foreseen this! If I could have

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foreseen this, I never would have left you! Never! Oh, Uncle Clement! Is she dying? Tell me the truth. Is my baby dying?" wailed Susan, folding her hands tightly.

"No, my dear, your child is not dying. She could not die. No one ever dies. No one can ever die. To live once is to live forever. Listen, Susan. Can language be clearer than this, in Tim. ii., 1, 10: 'Our Savior, Jesus Christ, hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' And, oh! how I wish every mourning heart could take these words home to its comfort. No, your child is not dying, for she cannot die; but, Susan, she is going from us, my dear, to a new life of inconceivable happiness," said the old man, earnestly.

Mrs. Blantyre, kneeling by the bedside, with her head down upon the counterpane, was sobbing heavily.

Erma, who had left the room a few moments before, now returned with a cup of tea on a little waiter, which she offered to the lady, saying:

"Pray take this, Susan. It will refresh you, dear."

"No, no! oh, no! I could not! I could not swallow a drop! It would choke me!" sobbed the weeping woman.

Erma desisted, and gave the waiter to Hinda, who carried it out of the room.

"Where are the children, Susan?" inquired Mr. Gladden.

"Flurry and Rooster? Oh, I left them downstairs. I dare say they are getting something to eat. Children of their age are so insensible," said Mrs. Blantyre, lifting her head and beginning to wipe the traces of tears from her face.

Later in the evening Fance awoke; but a change had passed over her. Her eyes were brighter than natural, and she seemed to have a little more strength than she had before she slept, although, perhaps, it was but factitious strength.

"Daddy—daddy," were her first words.

Clement Gladden bent over her and took her hand.

Mrs. Blantyre, standing beside him, stooped and spoke softly:

"Fance, my darling, Fance."

"My—dear—mamma," slowly murmured the dying

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child, putting up her failing hand to stroke the cheeks of her mother. Then, turning to Clement Gladden, she panted:

"Ro-dy!"

"She wants to see Rody. Bring him in to her, my dear," said Mr. Gladden to Mrs. Wolfsohn.

Erma passed noiselessly out of the room, but soon returned, leading by the hand her strong, bright boy, whom she sat upon the bed.

"Oh—how beautiful!" breathed the voice of Fance, a little stronger under excitement, while her small, white face grew radiant with joy as she gazed on the baby boy.

"What is beautiful, my own darling?" inquired her mother.

"Rody—beautiful!" gasped the child, still gazing on him with delight.

"Fance," said Mr. Gladden, gently.

At the sound of his voice the child turned her eyes on him and then smiled, as suddenly as a sunburst—smiled with rapture—murmuring:

"Oh—grand—grand!"

"What is grand, my own?"

"Daddy—is grand."

"Oh, she is delirious!" moaned Mrs. Blantyre.

"Stars!" cried the child, with a sinking voice, yet with an ecstatic smile.

"Stars, my darling? Where?"

"Oh! on daddy's—head. Brighter—than the—sun," panted Fance, putting her feeble, failing hand above her eyes as if to shade them from too bright a light while gazing in her "daddy's" face.

"Susan, I think you had better bring Eustace and Fleurie in to see her now. I would like to have her recognize them before—— Go, Susan, my dear, and fetch them," said Mr. Gladden, with difficulty controlling his emotion.

Mrs. Blantyre, weeping, left the room, and soon came back, followed by her two elder children, who, however they might have been solacing themselves downstairs, were serious enough now, as they approached the bedside of their dying sister.

She knew them both, smiled brightly on them, and at-

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tempted to hold out her hand, which fell powerless in the effort.

Fleurie and Eustace each gently took one of the fainting hands and tenderly kissed and petted it.

"Oh, pretty—pretty!" panted Fance, smiling on her sister and brother.

And, then, in a failing and dying voice, she began to babble of beautiful objects around her, of lovely faces wreathed with lilies, of majestic brows crowned with stars, of paradisaical gardens and of angel children.

This gentle, joyous delirium alternated with light and easy slumbers, through the whole evening, during which she continued to sink. At length the delirium gradually ceased, and the slumber seemed lighter and the breathing softer, until, just as the sun arose in the east, striking lances of light through every slat in the window shutters, and touching with one golden ray the brow of the sleeping child, it was seen that her gentle breath had stopped for good.

They all looked on in the silence of a holy awe, until old Clement Gladden arose and took the hand of the stricken mother, whispering:

"Come, dear. He who is the Resurrection and the Life is with her now."

As soon as Mrs. Blantyre had left the chamber her grief broke forth and became uncontrollable.

Shutting herself up in her own room, throwing herself down upon the sofa, and drawing her remaining children to her heart, she gave way to the wildest storm of sobs, and tears, and bitter self-reproaches.

"Oh, I never prized my angel as she should have been prized! It seems as if I never even knew her aright until now that I have lost her!

"I left it to others to show her the affection that won her love. I left it to others to make acquaintance with her sweet and lovely soul! I went away to another home and left her here!

"I even started on a long journey, and left her on the brink of her last illness! And I might not have got back in time to see her before she went to heaven.

"And oh! if I had not seen her again—if she had asked for me, and not found me before she left this world—I

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think the hearing of it must have killed me. Oh, unnatural mother that I have been!"

So, in the intervals of her suffocating sobs and tears, she wailed.

Fleurie, though weeping herself, attempted consolation.

"Don't blame yourself so much, mamma. You did all for the best. Fance loved Uncle Clement better than anybody in the world."

"I ought to have loved her so much as to have won her to love me, her mother, best."

"And, mamma, Fance wanted to stay with Uncle Clement."

"Ah! but if I had been a good and loving mother to her, she would have wanted to stay with me."

"But Uncle Clement made her so happy, mamma."

"I should have made her happy, Flurry."

"But, then, you know, you did all for Fance's sake. You know you said that poor old Uncle Clement could not live very long, and if you left little Fance with him to comfort him, he would leave little Fance all his property, and she would come back to you in time for you to bring her out as an heiress."

"Vain, worldly, mercenary dreams, that have ended in this!" exclaimed Susan Blantyre, with a fresh burst of grief.

While the bereaved mother sorrowed bitterly in her own chamber, old Clement Gladden sat alone in his study and communed with his own spirit. He was, perhaps, the most to be pitied of all who grieved for the child, for in losing her he had lost all—humanly speaking.

Erma, leaving her boy to the cheerful companionship of the two young servants, Hinda and Aquilo, called old Minty to her assistance, and went into the chamber of death to wash and dress the fair little body for its last bed.

How sweetly placid and peaceful seemed the lovely face and form, lying on the left side, with the golden hair flowing down over head and shoulder, back from the white forehead, with eyes and lips lightly closed as in soft slumber, one tiny hand under her cheek, the other lying lightly on the counterpane.

It seemed a desecration to touch her yet.

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Erma and Minty stood watching in reverent silence, and while they stood thus Dr. Dutton arrived on his usual daily visit.

He was shown up to the room by old Septimus, who rapped and opened the door to admit him, and then retired.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Wolfsohn. I am sorry for the news I have just heard," said the kind physician, as he walked up to the bed, gave Erma his hand, and then stood looking gravely down upon the little, peaceful form.

Erma replied by a bow. She could not trust herself to speak yet.

"I hear that Mrs. Blantyre arrived yesterday afternoon?"

Erma bent her head in affirmation, and struggled to recover her self-control.

"I am glad she got here in time. It would have been too sorrowful if she had not."

"Yes," faltered Erma.

"How does she find herself after her rapid journey and this great shock?"

"Very much overcome," said Erma, in a scarcely audible tone.

"And Mr. Gladden?"

"Shaken—fearfully shaken—quite incapable of attending to any details just now."

"Umph! Ah, yes, I suppose so! I suppose so."

"Dr. Dutton——"

"Well, my dear lady?"

"There is no one capable of taking the direction of affairs—shall I ask you to act a friend's part when you return to Ice Cliff, and send out the—the——"

"Undertaker?" inquired the doctor, in a low, sympathetic tone.

"Yes," she answered with a burst of tears.

"Certainly. I will see to all that is necessary. You will give my—— But I had better see them myself. Do you think, will they receive me?"

"Who, Mr. Gladden and Mrs. Blantyre?" inquired Erma.

"Yes."

"Oh! I think not, doctor. They have gone and shut

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themselves up—Mr. Gladden alone in his study, and Mrs. Blantyre with her children in her bedchamber."

"Then give them my sincere sympathy, and say that I will see them as soon as they permit me; and, in the meantime, I will serve them to the best of my ability. Will you say this, Mrs. Wolfsohn?"

"Certainly, Dr. Dutton."

"Then, my dear lady, I will bid you good-morning, and set about your errand," concluded the doctor, as he offered his hand to Erma, and with a long, regretful look at the still, pale form before him, turned and left the room.

Erma's eyes fell casually upon the little drift of white muslin and blue ribbons still lying upon the bolster of the bed.

She gathered it all in her hands and placed it on a distant table, saying:

"We will have this little dress made up, Minty. She wanted to wear it to church, and so it shall clothe her little body when that is taken there."

Then Erma reverently lifted the little, cold form, and laid it on her lap, and her own tender hands washed and dressed it, while Minty made up the bed. Lastly, Erma laid the form of the child, attired in a plain white wrapper, on the outside of the bed, and spread a white lace curtain over it.

Then Minty set the room in perfect order, and closed the window blinds.

Finally they shut up the room and left it together, Erma taking with her the white muslin that she intended to have made up.

Later on in the day, at the usual hour, the dinner was served, and the dinner bell rang.

Erma was the first to come down to the table, where it was her custom to preside. She was followed by Mr. Gladden and afterward joined also by Fleurie and Eustace.

But Susan Blantyre refused to appear at the board or to have anything sent to her.

The meal passed in silence.

In the afternoon the two children returned to their mother and Mr. Gladden retired to his study.

Erma, with the help of Minty and Hinda, went to work

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on the little white dress, which they completed and trimmed that night.

Early in the morning the form of little Fance was arrayed in the pretty, white muslin dress with the blue trimmings and blue slippers that she had craved before her illness, and so laid out in the cool, dark drawing room.

That same forenoon Mrs. Blantyre came downstairs in a state of wild excitement.

"I must see my child!" she wailed. "I will see my child!"

Mr. Gladden heard her and came out of his study.

"I must see my child!" she repeated, wringing her hands. "And I will see my child! No one shall hinder me!"

"And so you shall, my dear. No one wishes to hinder you. Come with me," he said, leading the way to the closed room, which he opened to admit her.

"In here?" she breathed.

"Yes, in here. Enter. This is the best place for you. Enter into its peace."

She followed him to the side of the white-draped table where the little, white-robed form lay, with flowers at its head and feet.

A holy calm fell upon the perturbed spirit.

Mr. Gladden turned down the white cover, revealing the fair, placid, beautiful face.

As the mother gazed, the calm descending on her spirit deepened into the "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

"Sit here, in the midst of the peace, and be comforted," said Clement Gladden, as he reverently covered the lovely face once more and drew an easy-chair to the side of the table for Susan's repose.

He left her there and closed the door.

He met Erma in the hall outside the room.

"How is she?" inquired the latter.

"Calmer, much calmer, as I thought she must be," he answered.

"Yet that treatment would not suit all mourners."

"No, perhaps not. One must be receptive, sympathetic, sensitive to the sphere of angels, to enter into the

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peace that envelops those who are asleep in Jesus," said the old man, slowly bowing his head.

"You must have suffered much yourself before you found that peace," said Erma, in a low voice.

"Yes—yes. Come with me, child, and I will tell you. I feel like telling you now, and, perhaps, the tale may teach you something," he answered, as he led the way into the little room in the rear of the parlor that he called his study.

He placed a chair for her and took another for himself at a short distance from her.

"The passing away of this child has brought all this back to me," he said, in a low and thoughtful tone, more as if he communed with his own spirit than as if he addressed another.

Erma listened in reverential silence.

"You have a beloved husband waiting for you in the higher life, dear child. You will be faithful to his memory till you go to join him there, to separate no more forever. And you look hopefully, confidently to that joyful meeting and to that eternal union."

"Oh, I do! I do! That faith is my support in this exile," replied the lady.

"Yes, dear child. And I also have borne life sustained by such a faith. I have a wife and two fair children in that higher world—a boy and a girl. You must have heard of the terrible blow by which I lost them all in one hour, Erma? It is still talked of in this neighborhood, and will never be forgotten, I think."

"I have heard of it," said the lady, in a very low tone.

"It was a thunderbolt of affliction that fell with fatal ruin in the fairest day of joy that ever dawned for man."

"I know," she sighed.

"We had been but five years married, Fance Fleetwood and I—this child was her niece, and bore the same name, you know."

"Yes."

"Ours was what is called a love match—a true love marriage. I brought my bride home to this house. I built it for her. I would not bring her to the old one, with its reminiscences of sorrows and deaths clinging about it. I built this new house in the sunshine on the hill, and

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planted young trees around it, and laid out lovely flower gardens about it, and I called the place Brighthome. I wanted to make a heaven on earth."

"And you did, Mr. Gladden," said Erma, with reverential sympathy.

"For five happy years we lived here, Erma, loving each other more and more every passing year. Two beautiful children came to bless us. First came the fair boy, whom his mother called Clement, for me. Next a fair girl, whom I called Fance, for her. When we had been five years in our paradise, and our boy angel was four years old, and our girl just two, the terrible stroke fell that swept them all from me at once! Swept them from me, said I? No! They have never been far away, though they seemed to be so for a time! They have never been far away, for they have been in heaven, and the kingdom of heaven is within us, and all around and about us!" said the old man, falling for a few moments into reverie.

Erma sat in respectful silence until he resumed.

"It fell on one of the most glorious summer days that ever smiled over the earth. We were spending the day at Darkwood with Mr. and Mrs. Lovel, the maternal grandparents of your husband. In the afternoon I went out with Mr. Lovel to walk over the estate. While we were gone, my wife and children, with Mrs. Lovel, went out in a boat to row on Low River. They had but one oarsman, a negro boy, but he was quite enough for fair weather and smooth water. They never dreamed of danger. But a storm rose suddenly. The sky grew dark as night, the wind blew a gale, the waters of the river rose, like the waves of the sea. They became alarmed. They made for the shore and tried to reach it, but the current was strong, and the boat became unmanageable. It was swamped. The boy did the best he could. He saved himself and his mistress, but my wife and babes were drowned."

"O-h-h-h—Heaven!" groaned Erma, with a long sigh, covering her eyes, as if the dreadful scene was passing too plainly before her.

"At first I was stunned as by a thunderbolt. Afterwards, mad, wild and idiotic by turns. I do not know how or when I got home; but I was at home, in this house, and lying flat on the parlor floor, with my face down,

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when some one—I don't know who—came up and told me that the bodies were all found—found and brought home, and laid out in the library. It was night. I went into the library alone, and I closed and locked the door before I approached the bodies of my beloved ones. Erma, are you heeding me?"

"Oh! yes; yes; with all my heart and brain!"

"I could not have explained it then—I knew not how or why it was—but from the moment I entered there and closed the door a sphere of peace enveloped and calmed me. The faces of my beloved ones were not the least disturbed. They had not been in the water long enough. And as I gazed on those sweet, serene, sleeping faces I grew to feel that theirs was a benign repose, the like of which never comes into a mortal lifetime—a deep, delicious sleep, from which they would awake in heaven. Oh! Erma, it was wonderful! wonderful! But I seemed to be watching my living and sleeping wife and babes, with the consciousness that angels watched them, too, and would watch them until they should awake in heaven. I spent the night there, solemnly, profoundly peaceful and resigned. I did not think then how lonely I should soon be. I only felt how well it was with them—how very well—and how, in a few years, at farthest, I should join them in the higher life to part with them no more forever. The third morning, Erma, these fair forms were laid side by side in the earth; but on that third morning I had seen a change in those calm faces; they had all shrunken somewhat, and by that I knew the beloved sleepers had already arisen from the dead, and awakened in heaven. There, Erma! There is the secret of my life of solitude——"

"And of benedictions. For though in one sense you have been alone, Mr. Gladden, you have been a blessing to many lives around you," said the lady.

The old man bowed in meek deprecation, and said:

"Little Fance Fleetwood, the third of that name, and called after my wife and daughter, has been the angel of my declining years. I thought to have made her life more prosperous and happy in this world, but the Lord has taken the work from my failing hand, and has made her divinely blessed in the higher life. I submit. I submit. I yield her up; but I feel that something has gone out of

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my own life here that I must follow soon—very soon. I cannot live here now. Your occupation is gone too, dear child; but you will not leave me on that account? You will stay with me for the little time I have to stay?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Mr. Gladden, I will stay with you gladly, if I can make life a little easier for you," said Erma, earnestly; for, as she looked at him, she saw too surely that his words were true; the caved-in cheeks and eyes, the half-transparent, chrysalis-like look of face and form showed too clearly that the material body was fast fading from him, and the spirit was almost ready to take its flight.

"Yes, Mr. Gladden," she repeated, "I shall be happy to stay with you, happy even on my own account and on Rody's, as well as on yours, if I can do you any good, for where could we be so much at home, so much at peace, as we are here?"

And never was gratitude purer than that which glowed in her heart and on her face as she spoke.

"I thank you, my dear. Do not let me detain you longer, Erma," he said.

And she left the study to go and do something for Susan Blantyre, who seemed incapable of doing anything for herself. It was to write to Capt. Blantyre, through the war department at Washington, to inform him of the sorrowful bereavement they had all suffered in the loss of little Fance, as the reason why Mrs. Blantyre could not go on to meet him at the capital, and to entreat him to obtain leave of absence as soon as possible, and come down to the family.

In the course of that day the news of the trouble had spread through the neighborhood, and sympathizing friends thronged to the house of mourning with sincere words of condolence and offers of services.

Erma had to receive them all.

Mr. Gladden was really too feeble to be disturbed, and Mrs. Blantyre too averse to seeing any company.

Among the first that came, early in the afternoon, was Miss Barbra Gunn.

After expressing her sorrow at what had happened, she asked to be permitted to see the little body.

But this Erma gently refused, saying:

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"Her mother is sitting by it now, and we must not intrude on her."

"Of course not. But is it not strange that she should be permitted to sit there? It is very bad for her, is it not?" inquired Miss Gunn.

"No, it has been found to be very good for her. Mr. Gladden led her there, when her grief was uncontrollable, and there she has grown calm, and continues calm."

"Well, I should think her grief might be uncontrollable. There is no grief so sharp as that which is pointed by remorse. To have abandoned her child as she did!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, in bitter indignation.

"Oh, Miss Barbra, don't say that! She never abandoned her child! She consulted that child's happiness and welfare rather than her own feelings, when she left Fance at Brighthome," pleaded Erma.

"That does not excuse her. The child's happiness should have been in her mother, more than in any other person, and it would have been so had that mother loved that child as she ought to have done."

"She did love Fance. She did, indeed! But she loved her disinterestedly, and sacrificed her own natural affections to Fance's welfare and happiness, and to Mr. Gladden's comfort," persisted Erma.

"And see, now, where it all ends—in the grave!"

"No, the Lord forbid! It does not end in the grave, but in heaven!"

"Well, my dear," said Miss Gunn, changing the subject, after a few minutes, "the loss of little Fance has unsettled you again. Your employment being gone, of course you will not remain here, after the funeral. A part of my errand this morning is to ask you to come with your child and stay with me at The Marsh, as long as you can find it convenient and agreeable to do so, and at least until you can look around yourself and settle upon something."

"You are very kind, Miss Barbra, and I thank you very much; but I shall remain here," said Erma.

"Remain here!" exclaimed the old lady. "What are you thinking of, my dear? You cannot remain here! It was an indiscreet action, let me tell you, to come here at all, even when you had the plausible excuse of a pupil to

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teach, and it took all the influence of your friends to uphold you in it! But now that your little pupil is gone you have not the shadow of an excuse for staying. It will be impossible for you to stay," said Miss Gunn, in the most emphatic way.

"Miss Barbra," answered Erma, very gravely, "I have not only an excuse for staying here, but a most holy duty to perform in staying. Mr. Gladden is my benefactor. He has had many sorrows in his life, and this last one has fallen very heavily upon him, when he is ill able to bear it. I cannot leave him alone. And what is more, I will not."

"Then, my dear, you will have the whole neighborhood talking about you, and who is to stop their tongues? The world is very cruel, Erma."

"Then I will not be cruel to please the cruel world. I will not leave Mr. Gladden alone. I will stay and comfort him, as a daughter.

"But, my dear Erma, consider. You are young and beautiful, and the world is envious and censorious of such. If you were old and ugly, now, you might stay here, or do anything else you wish to do unchallenged. Think, Erma."

"My dear Miss Barbra, I have thought. And the longer I have thought, the more clearly I have seen my duty, and the more determined I have become to do it. Let us consider the question settled, and waste no more words upon it."

"Then I will waste no more upon you, at least, Erma, but I will try what impression I can make upon old Mr. Gladden. If he is made to see this matter in the same light that I do, he would not, for his life, permit you to make such a sacrifice," said Miss Gunn, firmly.

"Miss Barbra!" exclaimed Erma, excitedly, "I must beseech you to say nothing to Mr. Gladden on this subject. I shall be very deeply displeased, if you or anyone should interfere with me to such an unwarrantable extent. Mr. Gladden is three-fold stricken with age, infirmity and sorrow. He cannot be here long. I must do all that I can to sustain and comfort him in his descending days."

"And 'smooth his passage to the grave,' I suppose."

"No, to the better, higher, happier life. We have noth-

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ing to do with the grave, Miss Barbra, but to lay our left-off bodies there," said Erma, solemnly.

"Well, my dear! There is an old Scotch proverb which says that 'a willfu' mon maun ha' his way,' and I know, for a certainty, that a willful woman must have hers. Good-by, my dear. I will do my best to set your generous conduct in its best light before detracting gossips; but I warn you that it will be difficult or impossible to do so."

"Take my advice, Miss Gunn, and pay no attention to detractors," said Erma.

"But, my dear, the trouble is that they pay too much attention to us. Well, give my best regards to Clement Gladden and Susan Blantyre, and tell them that I am very anxious to be of any service, if they will only tell me what I can possibly do for them."

"Thanks, Miss Barbra. We all know your kindness; but, really, there is nothing to be done that you could do, at present."

"Then, good-by once more, my willful child," said the old lady, who had behaved wonderfully well, for her, in not having flown into a passion with Erma for opposing her.

On the same day came Mrs. Morset and her nieces, Gen. Bibb and his daughters, and Cousin Wally Lambe and his wife.

The next day the funeral of little Fance took place.

It was a very large gathering, for Clement Gladden and Susan Blantyre had hosts of friends, who came in their private carriages to show their sympathy and respect on the sorrowful occasion.

On the sunny afternoon of that day the beautiful earthly form of little Fance was laid in its last bed in St. James Cemetery, at Ice Cliff.

Mrs. Blantyre had conquered her rebellious grief, and was so composed on that day as to excite the surprise and admiration of all her friends.

Some of the neighbors, as was the custom of that place, came home from the cemetery with the bereaved family and remained until night.

Many were the friendly and cordial invitations that Erma received to change her home for The Marsh, The

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Dale, Lambe's Lodge or Blantyre House; but she remained firm in her purpose to live at Brighthome.

The most urgent in trying to prevail on her to share their homes were Miss Barbra Gunn and Mrs. Blantyre; but they were equally unsuccessful.

That night all the ladies were to leave Brighthome except Erma, who resolutely refused to go.

Miss Barbra Gunn, who was afraid of the damp night air, was the first to take leave.

She kindly refused the attendance of Erma, when she went upstairs to put on her bonnet and shawl, and she called Susan Blantyre to go with her.

"I wanted to have a talk with you, Susan," she said, as soon as they were alone together, with closed doors.

"So did I with you," answered the younger lady.

"About Erma?"

"Yes, about Erma."

"That is my subject, also, Susan Blantyre. This is really a fatal resolution she has formed of remaining here."

"I fear it will injure her; but it is very unjust that it should; her motives are as pure and holy as ever moved the heart of woman. She is, besides, really doing her highest duty. I do not, indeed, see how she could do otherwise, even in compliance with your advice and my entreaties. It would be cruel and ungrateful of her to leave Mr. Gladden alone with his age and sorrows," said the kind-hearted Susan Blantyre.

"After all, it would not seem so desperate a case if it were not for the possibility of her husband being alive. Good Heaven! If the rumor be really true, and if Rodolph Wolfsohn were to return and find his wife living at Brighthome as the housekeeper, companion or nurse, whichever you call it, of Clement Gladden! I dare not think of the consequences! It would be a domestic tragedy! a household wreck!" exclaimed Miss Barbra, with a strange solemnity.

"I do not know why it should cause Rodolph Wolfsohn the least annoyance. Most men would be glad and grateful that wife and child in their bitter need should have found such a haven of peace and safety as old Clement Gladden's house," said Mrs. Blantyre.

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"Yes; but Rodolph Wolfsohn is not like most men. Rodolph Wolfsohn is a strongly marked individual, with a great deal of human nature and a great deal more of Satanic nature in him. Proud, jealous, suspicious, cynical, sarcastic—scarcely believing in anyone's integrity, and always bitterly opposed to any woman's placing herself in any position in which she might be exposed to criticism or misconstruction. Conceive, if you can, what will be his feelings, what will be his course, should he really be alive, and should he come home to find his wife at Brighthome!"

"I am afraid to think of it!" cried Susan Blantyre, with a shudder.

"Then had I not better warn Erma that her husband may be living, and may return, and, if he should do so, he would be bitterly enraged to find her at Brighthome? Mind! I should have told her before this had I not promised you to keep the secret from her. Give me leave now to reveal it for her good."

"No! no!" emphatically exclaimed Susan Blantyre. "Not for the world! You might be but deluding her with a false hope. Capt. Blantyre charged me not to let the report come to her ears until there was some degree of certainty in it. I told you only on condition of your silence. You promised not to repeat it, and I hold you to your promise."

"And, of course, I shall keep my promise. But it is hard to see an avalanche about to fall and not to warn the people in its way to make their escape," said Miss Gunn, as she tied her bonnet strings and left the room.

The funeral guests were all departed from Brighthome, and the house returned to its usual quiet; but not to its former cheerfulness.

Oh, the difference that the presence or the absence of one fair child may make!

Fance was missed all over the house and grounds, and mourned by all and every member of the family.

Old Mr. Gladden left home only once in the month succeeding her departure, and then it was supposed that he went to his lawyer, at Ice Cliff, to make a new will since now his angel Fance would not need his poor, worldly wealth.

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After this visit he stayed at home, and he spent much time during the day sitting in the sunshine out on his front piazza.

Erma divided her time between her housekeeping avocations, her child's care and her benefactor's comfort.

Near friends and neighbors came often to see them, and their days passed contentedly, if not yet cheerfully, until one morning, about five weeks after little Fance had gone to heaven.

It was a glorious morning early in July, when Erma was sitting in the small parlor appropriated to herself, and singing a nursery song as she rocked her little boy to sleep, when she heard a step in the hall without, and the voice of some one who came and opened the room door.

Erma looked up and saw a man standing before her, with a brow as black and threatening as a thundercloud.

She screamed.

It was her husband, Rodolph Wolfsohn.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTIVE'S RETURN.

Though long the wanderer may depart,
And far his footsteps roam,
He clasps the closer to his heart
The image of his home.
To that loved spot, where'er he goes,
His tenderest thoughts are cast,
And dearer still through absence grows
The memory of the past. —JAMES D. BURNS.

To explain the sudden appearance of Rodolph Wolfsohn at Brighthome it will be necessary to go back a little in time.

The rumor of his life and captivity among a hostile tribe of Indians was a true one. The full details of that captivity were never known, for it was a subject upon which Rodolph Wolfsohn seldom cared to speak. A few particulars of the misfortune, however, transpired.

On that fatal day when, during their march southward over the Western plains, Lieut. Wolfsohn's party, in charge of the baggage train, was surprised and surrounded by a far superior force of armed and mounted savages. The soldiers, after making a brave and desper-

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ate resistance, were overpowered, massacred, stripped and mutilated, and the wagons, horses and provisions of all sorts were captured and carried off.

How it happened that Lieut. Wolfsohn was taken prisoner instead of being killed can never be certainly known, as no reporter has ever been found to have "interviewed" the red leaders of that assault, on the subject.

Mr. Wolfsohn himself remembered nothing from the moment when earth and sky, noon and night, light and darkness, rushed together in swift, overwhelming chaos, as he fell dead on the sage plains under the crushing blow of a tomahawk, to the instant when he came to life in a half infantile, half idiotic state in an Indian camp in the depths of the forest.

Probably the savage warrior who stooped to scalp or to strip his corpse after he had fallen found some signs of life left in him, and—the fight being over, and victory secured—carried off this solitary and unconscious warrior for purposes of torture or of ransom; probably, also, this first purpose was abandoned, or the second failed, for it is certain that Rodolph Wolfsohn remained a disabled captive for many months among them before reviving strength and some opportunity favored his escape.

Afterward, in attempting to cross the wilderness, on his way to the American lines, he was captured by a band of Mexican soldiers, and thrown into prison.

At the very time when the rumor of his life and captivity among the Comanches first reached his own regiment, he was in reality not among the red men, but was languishing in a Mexican fortress.

Soon after the close of the war he was liberated. He procured transportation to Washington, where his regiment had been ordered.

In due time he reached the city and reported himself at headquarters, where he learned that his regiment had been disbanded and its officers and men had dispersed to their homes.

He lost no time in following their example. He borrowed a sum of money from an old friend and set out at once for his native county.

He had not heard from his wife, or from his home, for

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the last two years, nor, since his release from captivity, had he seen anyone who could give him any news.

Thus it was that with every stage of his homeward journey his uneasiness increased, his suspense rose to anxiety, his anxiety to terror!

What might not have happened at home—happened to her, during the two years of his absence and of his supposed death?

Erma might have died—died of grief for his loss! She had loved him so ardently; she had suffered so acutely at parting with him! Yes, she might have died broken-hearted at his loss!

At that possibility he felt a tender despair, not altogether without its consoling self-complacency, and he resolved, if such were the case, he would remain faithful to her memory as long as he should live.

But—ah! "how sharper than a serpent's tooth" was the next suggestion: Erma might have married again! Young widows almost always married. Why, they were surer to do so than young girls! Had not his own mother married a second time? Had not Mrs. Fleetwood married a second time?

Yes, young widows were certain to marry again. Young widows were the very—unmentionable majesty himself!

But—if Erma Wolfsohn had married again!

Rodolph consigned his soul to all the fiends in fire if he did not kill her second husband, as he would kill a rattlesnake, or a rabid dog, wherever he should find the wretch! He would not hurt a hair of Erma's head! No! he would murder her second husband and be hanged for him, and leave Erma to a life of bitter remorse and burning shame! He ground his teeth until they seemed to crash, he clinched his hands until, but for the buckskin gloves, his nails must have cut into his palms. So great a lunatic had imagination, for the moment, made of him.

Then came a strong reaction, as if all angels and good spirits who felt a benevolent interest in poor human nature had come to inspire holier and happier thoughts.

Erma had not married again! She was too loving and too faithful to forget him in two short years and insult his memory with a successor! No, nor had she died of

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grief! No, much as she had loved him, she had not died of grief for his loss; she was too strong, too patient, too Christian to do that.

He should find his Erma living at home at Darkwood, cherishing his memory, protecting his poor old slaves, taking care of his property, doing her whole duty, to the Lord and to the neighbor; perhaps, like Penelope, still looking for his return, still hoping against despair, as only the loving and the faithful can. If this should be so—and it must be so—oh, how happy he should be! How happy he should make her! Their future life should be an elysium on earth!

How slow was the express stagecoach that carried him southward! Oh! that he had wings swift as thought, to take him to her presence, that their joys might commence!

Such were some of the thoughts and feelings that crowded brain and bosom as he traveled homeward in the stagecoach.

At Lexington his impatience became uncontrollable. He purchased a swift and strong roadster and set off on horseback toward home. He changed horses twice a day, at sunrise and at sunset, and rode day and night, resting only for the few minutes required to eat a hearty meal and saddle a fresh horse.

In all this hurried journey he had not met a single human being whom he knew, or of whom he could inquire concerning the people of his home and neighborhood.

"I shall take them all by surprise," he said, as early one morning he descended the road leading down the wooded hills toward Darkwood—"I shall take them all by surprise! Yet I must not startle Erma! It is said that joy never kills; yet I have heard that it has sometimes done so. I must keep a lookout for one of the servants and instruct him how to break the news of my arrival to her. Let me see! let me see! It will be difficult, though," he mused, with a perplexed frown. "Very difficult! I must tell him to say, first, that a soldier, returned from the Mexican War—one of Lieut. Wolfsohn's company, wishes to see her to deliver a message or news from her husband—no! that would not do! I must tell him to—— Hello! Whom have we here?" he broke off suddenly in his meditation and exclaimed, as the sound of rapidly

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approaching horse's feet was heard from the opposite direction.

In another minute the horseman hove in sight, riding up the wooded hill as if to meet the traveler.

The newcomer was Mr. Gustave Perlemonte.

The next moment the two men rode up and met face to face.

Both drew rein and halted. Both looked, startled, stared, recognized each other, and simultaneously exclaimed:

"You!"

"You!"

"Mr. Perlemonte!"

"Rodolph Wolfsohn!"

"Can the dead rise again?" cried Rodolph, staring at his *vis-à-vis* with incredulous amazement.

"It appears so, since I see you standing before me," responded Perlemonte, returing the stare with interest.

"How—when—where——" began the younger man, but stopped for want of words or breath. Astonishment had taken away both.

"Yes! where—when—how?" mocked Perlemonte, with a laugh.

"I—we—it——" said Rodolph, still utterly demoralized by his bewilderment.

"Exactly! It—we—I——" mocked and laughed Perlemonte.

Rodolph endeavored to recover himself, and attempted to explain:

"I meant to ask you how you had escaped; when you had arrived; where you had been; and to say that I—we —had believed you dead—that it was reported, nay, even proved, that you were."

"A great many things are proved that were never true, I suspect, Rodolph. I am tired of telling the story of my rescue and my wanderings. Here, I will pack it all into a nutshell. The night the villain, Herne, hurled me overboard from the deck into the sea, I was left behind by the homeward-bound steamer and picked up by an outward-bound East Indiaman, that took me a three-years' voyage around the world. I returned about a year ago and have

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been living here ever since. *Voila tout,*" said Parlemonte, in the same mocking tone.

"Then you can give me news of my wife! My wife! Is she still—— How is she? Is she in good health?" anxiously demanded Rodolph.

"Be easy on that subject. She is in perfectly good health. You are going to Darkwood? I will turn and ride back with you," said Perlemonte.

"But, perhaps, to do so may inconvenience you? You may have some business or pleasure on hand," said Rodolph, who was impatient to ride on and desirous of meeting his wife without witnesses, after so long a separation.

"Oh, not at all, I was but riding for exercise. There is no business so important, no pleasure so attractive, as that we have now in hand!" exclaimed Perlemonte, with a sinister smile, that escaped the notice of Wolfsohn.

Rodolph now reflected that this man would be a more intelligent agent to "break the news" to Erma than any of the simple negroes could possibly be. He was ruminating how to ask Mr. Perlemonte to undertake the delicate mission, when the latter spoke:

"I had heard a rumor, that came, I think, from some eavesdropping servant who had overheard a conversation at Blantyre House, to the effect that you had not been massacred with your unfortunate company, but had been captured by the Comanches. I did not believe it at the time. Now I see that it must have been true. But how did you make your escape, then?"

"To escape from captors who have neither locks nor chains is easy enough, since the only way in which they can prevent it is to maim or to kill the captive. But I do not wish to talk of myself. How is my dear wife? Tell me of her."

"I told you that she is in excellent health and spirits," replied Perlemonte.

"'Spirits!'" echoed Wolfsohn.

"Oh, dear, yes! Excellent spirits! Excellent health and spirits! She is as blooming as a rose and as gay as a lark!" maliciously exclaimed Perlemonte.

"I am sure I am very glad to hear it," said Rodolph, in a very inconsistent tone of misery. "She is at Darkwood still, of course?" he added, half interrogatively,

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thinking, perhaps, that she might possibly be at Blantyre House, with Mrs. Blantyre, or somewhere else in the neighborhood with some other lady friend.

"'At Darkwood?' Lord bless you, no! She is the lady and mistress of a far more luxurious home than ever Darkwood could be made into," laughed Perlemonte.

"'The lady'—— What on earth do you mean, sir? Has my wife come into any rich inheritance?" inquired Wolfsohn, in perplexity.

"No, not at all. That is to say, not that I know of. Nor does she need any rich inheritance beyond that of her youth and beauty."

"What are you driving at? Where is my wife? If not at Darkwood, where I left her, where then is she?" inquired the young husband, in growing anxiety.

"Come, come, Wolfsohn! I tell you that she is in excellent health and spirits. Blooming as a rose, and gay as a lark. Let that suffice for the present. What further I have to tell is not to be told and discussed upon the public high-road, but rather in private, with closed doors. Come on with me to Darkwood, where I will give you every explanation."

"But where is my wife? Tell me that!" peremptorily demanded Wolfsohn.

"At Brighthome!" answered Perlemonte, in a low, mysterious whisper, as though he were uttering

"Words of wantonness and fear."

"'At Brighthome?'" echoed Rodolph Wolfsohn, in perplexity. "Brighthome? But I thought—there was—no lady presiding at Brighthome."

"Well, there is no lady except herself. She rules there."

"But—Oh, my soul!" exclaimed the young husband, as a sudden fear flashed with lightning, blasting power through his brain—"you do not mean that she is married—that Erma is married to the old master of Brighthome?"

"N-n-o, better, perhaps—if she had—made that mistake; for it would have been an innocent error," said Perlemonte, with an affected sigh.

"In the fiend's name, what is it that you would insinuate?" finally demanded Rodolph Wolfsohn, while his

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whole convulsed countenance betrayed the stormy anguish of his doubts and fears.

"Hush, Rodolph. Here we are at the gate, and there is the boy coming to open it for us. Wait until we reach the house, and I will tell you all," whispered Mr. Perlemonte, as they drew rein.

The young colored groom swung open the gate, and held it back for the two horsemen to pass through. He was a stranger to Mr. Wolfsohn, and so did not recognize the newcomer.

"Follow us, Hiram, and take the horses," said Mr. Perlemonte, as he rode on toward the house, accompanied by his stepson.

Arrived at the front door, both horsemen dismounted in haste, flung the reins to the waiting groom, and went into the house.

Mr. Perlemonte turned to his stepson and inquired:

"Will you go into the hall dressing droom to wash, after your ride?"

"No, no, nowhere, but to some place where I can sit down and hear—what you have to tell me," answered Rodolph, in a shaking voice.

"Then come in here," said the master of the house, opening a door on the right and admitting him into the old-fashioned parlor so often mentioned in this story.

CHAPTER XIV.

SLANDER AND JEALOUSY.

If you are wise, and prize your peace of mind,
Believe her true, nor listen to the slanderer;
Let not that devil which undoes your sex,
That most accursèd jealousy, mislead you
To listen to detractions, which, despised,
Shall never hurt your quiet, but believed,
Shall sit upon your heart, pinch it with pain,
And banish sweet sleep forever from you. —ROWE.

Young Wolfsohn threw himself into an armchair before the bright little fire that the chilly September morning made so acceptable.

"Let me order something to drink, then. What will you have? Wine—brandy?"

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"Nothing, thank you; nothing whatever. I am athirst only to hear of my wife!"

Mr. Perlemonte went to the room door, opened it and looked out into the hall. Seeing no one there, he shut and locked the door and came and drew a chair to the fire, near that of his stepson, and seated himself in it.

"Now, my dear Rodolph, I know that you have often looked upon me with great aversion—the naturally great aversion that all stepsons feel for their stepfathers—and in this state of mind you have beed led to exaggerate my faults."

"I am very sorry if I have seemed to treat you with injustice, Mr. Perlemonte, but—if you will excuse my saying it—it is not of you, it is of my wife that I wish to hear," Rodolph interrupted, in a keenly painful voice.

"I am coming to that presently. I said that, in your prejudice against me as your stepfather, you had exaggerated my faults; for I confess that I have faults, or rather, that I have had them; now I have abandoned them, and never, I may safely say, among my faults was to be found a want of interest in you, the only son of my dear lost wife."

"But Erma! Erma!" groaned the young husband.

"Yes, yes, I am coming to her. Oh, Rodolph, tell me! how long did you know this young woman before you made her your wife and gave into her hands the custody of your honor?" inquired Perlemonte, in a grave, subdued tone.

"I knew this young lady," said Wolfsohn, with marked emphasis, "about eight months before she honored me with her hand."

"Eight months only? Hum! And she was a stranger in the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"And—I think I have heard that—that—she was extremely reticent as to her antecedents?"

"It is true," muttered the young man, under his breath.

"And that no one knew who she was, or what her family, or, in fact, anything at all about her, except that she came here as a governess, recommended by Bishop Whiting?"

"That was all we knew, until we became acquainted

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with herself; then we found her to be a beautiful, amiable and accomplished, though deeply sorrow-stricken woman," said Wolfsohn.

"Yes, with a sorrow the nature of which she dared not communicate to anybody—not even to you—not even when you became her betrothed lover—not even when you became her hubsand."

"No," slowly admitted Rodolph Wolfsohn—"no; yet she did not deceive me. She warned me that she had this incommunicable secret."

"She warned you of that which she could not long keep from you. She warned you of that which all her acquaintances but yourself knew—that she had a secret which she dared not tell!"

"What is it that you would insinuate? To what does all this talk tend?" fiercely demanded Wolfsohn.

"My dear Rodolph, I would soften this communication to you if I could. I have tried to prepare you for it; but I am afraid I have attempted impossibilities."

"Say on, man. In the demon's name, say on!" cried Wolfsohn, furiously starting to his feet, and beginning to pace the floor with rapid, irregular steps.

"Then, my dear boy, this Erma is utterly unworthy of you," whispered Perlemonte, in an impressive tone.

"'Unworthy!' How dare you?" exclaimed Rodolph, striding toward his stepfather with uplifted, threatening hand, as if he would have stricken him to the floor.

"Hold! Rodolph. I did not make her what she is. I did not make her an unprincipled adventuress, the companion of felons; nor did I make her your wife. I was at the antipodes when you first met her and married her. But I had known this young woman in the North long before her advent in this part of the country. I knew her to be the companion of disreputable people; some of them were felons—some in jail. She herself was obliged to leave the North."

"By all the demons, Mr. Perlemonte, if you are repeating slanders of my——"

"Hold there, Rodolph! Never acknowledge her to be your wife. She has forfeited that title. As to slanders —what interest can I possibly have in speaking any ill

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of her that is not truth? But you shall test the truth for yourself. You can do it most thoroughly."

"If she is what you would represent, how came the Right Reverend Doctor Whiting to indorse her?" demanded Wolfsohn, with an air of indignant triumph.

Perlemonte shrugged his shoulders with a helpless look, and answered:

"How can I tell? She must have imposed a false character on the bishop, or false papers on you. I know what I am talking about, Rodolph, my boy. I knew the woman's antecedents—those antecedents which she dared not make known to you! And, as I said before, you can test her yourself! Where is she now? What is her present position? She is at present living at Brighthome as Mr. Clement Gladden's—housekeeper," said Perlemonte, with an ineffable sneer.

"At Brighthome! Yes, you said that before. Mr. Gladden's housekeeper! Erma—my wife—Mr. Gladden's housekeeper! Fiends and furies! That should be enough!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, striding to and fro on the floor like a wild beast in his den.

Then stopping suddenly before his stepfather, he hoarsely demanded:

"How came she to go there? What drove her to that step?"

"Sit down, Rodolph, and command yourself or I will not open my mouth to utter another word," said Mr. Perlemonte, firmly.

Wolfsohn threw himself into a chair, and dropped his head upon his open hands, muttering:

"Go on! I will be still! Yes, still as a thunder cloud before it breaks in rain! Go on, I say! I must hear all to the uttermost, bitterest drop of humiliation, and then—I will kill Clement Gladden!"

"Rodolph, when I came here, about a year ago, and found her, this notorious Erma, known to the Northern police by half a dozen aliases, living in this house as your widow and the mother of your orphan child——"

"Child? What child? She had no child!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, lifting his agonized face from his hands and staring at the speaker. "Erma had no child!"

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"Ay! but she had! A pretty little boy in arms, whom she called your son and heir."

Rodolph sprang from his seat with a muttered imprecation, but Perlemonte laid his hand upon him and said:

"Now sit down and control yourself, or I will not go on!"

"There can be nothing worse to bear than this!" groaned the wretched young man, throwing himself again into his seat and dropping his head upon his hands.

"You must understand that I saw this woman and recognized her before she saw or recognized me. You may judge I was profoundly astonished to find her living here as your honored widow and the guardian of your son and heir——"

"Fiends!"

"Rodolph!"

"Go on! go on ! I will be silent!"

"I should explain that when I returned from my long, compulsory sea voyage around the world, during which I had been supposed to be dead, I came down to this neighborhood in disguise to look around me and see for myself what people had been doing with my property, and what they were saying of myself, before making my identity known! A sort of *Haroun al Raschid* curiosity, you know, Rodolph!"

"Cut that and go on!"

"A fancy took me then to play the spy on this city adventuress, who was taking the rôle of a country lady of the manor. I really determined—since I could not undo the marriage or the mischief done by it—if I found her to be truly reformed, and living a good and useful life, to leave her in possession here; but if I found her unworthy, to send her packing.

Rodolph Wolfsohn groaned.

Perlemonte continued:

"The better to carry out my plan, after hearing that she was in need of a farm manager, I engaged with her under an assumed name, in that capacity. I had not been long on the place before I made two discoveries—the first was, that this woman was greatly beloved and honored in this neighborhood."

"So she was! She was!" groaned Wolfsohn.

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"The second discovery proved that she did not deserve to be! She had a lover! This discreet young widow—this revered young lady of the manor—had a lover!—a daily visitor—an old dotard, who worshiped her, and lavished love upon her, and loaded her with luxuries and splendors, that the modest revenues of Darkwood could never have afforded."

"I shall go mad!" broke forth the young husband, starting up again.

"Will you be quiet, or must I be silent?" exclaimed Perlemonte.

Wolfsohn dropped into his seat again and covered his working face with his hands.

Perlemonte resumed the weaving of his artful tissue of truth and falsehood:

"At first I thought the old man meant to offer her honorable marriage, and I watched and made no sign. But as week after week and month after month slipped by I began to wonder that we heard no mention of such a change. At last my eyes were opened. Rodolph, I would rather not tell you how my eyes were finally opened," said Perlemonte, hypocritically.

"No, don't! don't!" exclaimed the unhappy man, in a voice of anguish.

"Then I went to my lady first in the character of her honest, faithful servant and ventured to offer her some advice relative to her conduct in this affair. But, of course, I was met, as I might have expected to be, with indignation and scorn and threats of discharge. Affairs grew worse and worse. That man seemed almost to live in the house."

Another start and imprecation from Wolfsohn, and another rebuke and warning from Perlemonte, and the victim subsided into apparent quietude, and his tormentor took up the thread of the discourse.

"Finding all my humble efforts to mend matters, while in the rôle of a faithful servant, met with nothing but ridicule and contempt, I threw off all disguise, declared myself to be Gustave Perlemonte, proved my identity and assumed my proper position as master of the house."

"And sent her forth, drove her to the last, fatal, des-

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perate, irrevocable step she took!" hoarsely exclaimed Rodolph Wolfsohn.

"No, never—not at all—by no means!" quickly replied Perlemonte, with seemingly honest earnestness. "All that I did was done for her good, not for her harm."

"What—did—you—do?" demanded Wolfsohn, in a slow, choking voice.

"As soon as my authority as head of the household was established beyond dispute, I had a serious talk with my lady. I told her that I, being the stepfather of her late husband—we believed you to be dead then, you know, Rodolph—I stood in the relation of father-in-law to herself and of guardian to her child."

Here again Wolfsohn bounced up with a firece malediction, and had to be seized and recalled to his senses by Perlemonte before the latter continued:

"I told her that as her father-in-law and the child's guardian I was the natural and proper protector of both, and that I could afford both a comfortable and honorable home during my life, in this house, which, after my death, must certainly be theirs. I added, in regard to her daily visitor, that if Mr. Gladden had any matrimonial intentions toward her, I should not object to his visits, but that if he had no such intentions, I should assuredly forbid him the house."

"And she? And she? What did she say? or do?" vehemently demanded Wolfsohn.

"Thanked me for nothing! Received my kindly offers with scorn! Met my warning threats with defiance!"

"And you—what did you?"

"Of course I kept my word in regard to Mr. Clement Gladden! I turned the hoary hypocrite from my doors."

"And then?" hoarsely, breathlessly demanded Wolfsohn.

"She left my house, went to Brighthome and threw herself upon the protection of Mr. Gladden."

"Enough! enough!" cried Rodolph Wolfsohn, livid with rage, as he started up, seized his hat and rushed to the door.

"Rodolph!" cried Perlemonte, starting up and springing upon his stepson. "Where are you going?"

"To Brighthome! Unhand me!" exclaimed the en-

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raged husband, struggling fiercely to free himself from Perlemonte's firm clasp.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Perlemonte, holding him fast.

"To kill him! Let me go! There!" roared the madman, flinging his captor off by a violent effort and rushing from his room.

He ran to the stable, flung saddle and bridle upon his horse, and scarcely pausing long enough to gird them properly, threw himself into the saddle, dashed spurs in his horse's flanks, and set off on a gallop toward Brighthome.

"Hi!—what de matter long o' he?" inquired one of Perlemonte's new grooms, who was a stranger to Mr. Wolfsohn.

"I d'no; but he do ride like de debbil was behind him," replied the other.

And both stood with open mouths and eyes staring after the vanishing horseman.

Meanwhile Rodolph Wolfsohn, all on fire with rage and jealousy, galloped madly on toward Brighthome, up hill and down dale, with reckless speed, nor once drew rein until he reached the porter's lodge.

The gate stood open, and he sped through and on toward the house. He flung himself from his horse, and dashed up the steps, and through the open door.

"Where is—your master?" he demanded of the startled old servant, Jugurtha, who happened to be in the hall.

The man, who recognized Mr. Wolfsohn, but thought he was about to be interviewed by that gentleman's ghost, pointed nervously to the parlor and fled precipitately.

Rodolph Wolfsohn dashed open the door with his flat hand and strode into the parlor, where he found—not the gray-haired old gentleman whom he had come to look for—but a beautiful, pale woman, clothed in deep mourning, seated in a low rocking chair, and singing to a lovely child whom she held in her arms and rocked.

At the sight of that innocent pair his darkest thoughts fled, for an instant, as the shadows of night flee before the beams of the morning sun; but, ah! only for an instant.

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Startled by the noise of his entrance she looked up and —uttered a piercing scream.

Surprise, amazement and overwhelming joy deprived her of all power of motion for a minute, and then she hastily put down her boy, arose and sprang to meet him.

But he extended both hands to keep her off and sternly exclaimed:

"Whose child is that?"

"'Whose child?' Rodolph—Oh, Rodolph!" Her voice broke down under unutterable emotion, and she would have cast herself in his arms had he not seized her wrist and held her aloof from himself while he fiercely repeated his question:

"Woman! I ask you—whose child is that?"

"'Whose child?' Mine, Rodolph! Yours! Ours!" she answered, half in pride, half in terror of—she knew not what. "He is ours."

"'Ours!'" echoed Rodolph Wolfsohn in fiercest wrath and bitterest scorn, while the red light leaped to his fiery dark eyes. "'Ours!' When I left home, nearly two years ago, for the Mexican War, I left you a lonely, broken-hearted, childless wife, hopeless, thoughtless of children. I come back to find you a gay, lively, singing mother with a yearling babe upon your knee. Explain this."

"Rodolph! Oh, what do you mean? Why, I should think you would be so glad to find him. But I do not understand what the matter is," she answered, terror now overcoming every other feeling.

"The matter is this!" he cried, in fierce and bitter scorn —"the matter is this: That when I went away to the Mexican War I left you at my home, Darkwood. I left you without a child, or the thought of a child. I return after two years' absence and I find you not at Darkwood, where I left you, but at Brighthome! Not a sad, childless wife, as I left you, but a gay mother, dandling your yearling infant on your knee!"

She understood him only too well now. Another woman, even as meekly loving as herself, might have been filled with unutterable indignation at finding herself the object of such base, injurious suspicion; but Erma's spirit had been broken, and her pride subdued by heavy afflictions.

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She was much more sorrowful than indignant as she sank down in her chair, and answered him:

"Rodolph, it is true that when you went to Mexico, two years ago, I was hopeless of children; but that was because I was so young and inexperienced that I did not know that this dear boy of ours was coming to us. Rodolph, four months after you left I got the news that you had been massacred, with all your command, by the Comanche Indians. Rodolph, this news would have killed me if it had not happened that this child came to comfort me, and give me something to live for! He came to me in March, six months after you left me, Rodolph, and two months after I had heard that false report of your death that I believed until to-day. So that I never had the knowledge of your continued existence, nor the opportunity of informing you about him, though he is now eighteen months old. This is the truth, Rodolph, as Heaven is my witness!" she added, meekly.

"It is false! false! false! Every word that you have spoken is an untruth! Oh, I have heard of you, madam! I have heard of your career! Your criminal antecedents! Your long course of deception! An impostor from first to last! Look at that—thing—there!" he cried, furiously, pointing and stepping toward little Rody, as if he would have seized and slain the child.

"Oh, do not hurt the boy!" screamed Erma, suddenly darting between them, snatching up her child and pressing him to her bosom. "Oh, pray, pray do not hurt him!"

"Hurt him? Hurt him!" echoed Rodolph Wolfsohn, in a tone of ineffable contempt. "Why, do you suppose that I would stoop to hurt him? Hurt a creature so helpless as that? Tut! woman! I would not even hurt you, unworthy as you are of forbearance! No! You are both safe enough from my hurting! You are objects of scorn and loathing! Of disgust and abhorrence! not of vengeance! No! I did not come here to hurt you, nor even to reproach you! You—you have fallen far too low for my reproaches! I came here to verify with my own eyes the tales that are told of you! To take vengeance, not on a poor minion like you, but on one other, and then to leave you forever!"

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And, throwing off the hand that she had just laid in deprecation upon his arm, he turned to leave the room.

But quick as lightning she sprang between him and the door, placed her back against it, and stood with extended hands to intercept him, while she pleaded.

"Rodolph! oh, Rodolph! What is this? What have I done? Of what crimes am I accused? Ah! who has gained your ear and poisoned your mind against me, your true wife? Oh, Rodolph, speak! Give me a chance to defend myself!"

"Stand out of my way!" he thundered. "Stand out of my way and let me pass! I do not wish to be forced to lay hands on you!"

"Rodolph! oh, Rodolph! hear me! Come and sit down! Put me on my defense! Let me hear the charges against me, that I may clear myself of them! For I can do so, because I am entirely innocent."

"Will you stand aside?" he roared.

"Rodolph! Rodolph! Do not mar this meeting after so long and hopeless an absence—this meeting that should make this day the happiest day of our lives—do not mar it, I say, by cruel doubts of your wife, and base charges against her! Hear me, Rodolph!" she prayed, clasping her hands.

But he lost every remnant of his self-command, seized her with fury, and hurled her across the room with so much violence that she fell heavily against the opposite wall, as he flung himself out of the room, slamming the door after him.

Little Rody screamed with terror, and ran to his fallen mother.

Erma, half-stunned, bewildered, overwhelmed by the force of the shock, tried to raise herself upon her elbow and compose her mind to pacify the distressed child. And though the motion caused her sharp physical pain, and though her heart was breaking with a much sharper mental pain, yet she controlled herself sufficiently to repress all her groans, and she gathered the child to her bosom, and tried to soothe his distress with cheerful words and tender caresses.

But you cannot blind children by any sort of benevolent veil. Little Rody knew that his mother was injured

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and was suffering, all the same. And he continued to sob on her bosom, to kiss her lips, to pat her cheek, and to lisp, with infantile pity, from time to time:

"My poor mamma! My poor mamma!"

At length Erma thought that she would rise and lead the child from the room, that he might forget his fright in some other scene.

But in attempting to lift him she suffered such acute pain in her right ankle that she nearly fainted; and now she made the discovery that the bone was broken.

She could not move from the spot on which Rodolph Wolfoshn, with the frenzied and brutal fury of his jealousy, had thrown her. She could not even rise to reach the bell and ring for assistance. Nor could the child's little fingers unlatch the door to let himself out to summon aid. She must lie there with her broken ankle until some one should happen to enter the room. She sank down nearer the floor, while the child stood by her, now patting her face or laying his cheek against hers, and sobbing:

"My poor, dear mamma! My poor, dear mamma!"

At length some one approached the door, opened it, and entered the room.

It was old Minty, in such a state of alarm and consternation that she did not even notice the prostrate condition of her young lady, but hurried across the room, exclaiming:

"Oh, my mist'ess, come to marster! Come to my poor old marster! Come, mist'ess; come! Somefing awful have happened to him!"

"What? What?" cried Erma, in deadly terror, as her thoughts flew back to Rodolph Wolfsohn and his dire threats of vengeance.

"Oh, my dear mist'ess, he is dead! He is dead!"

CHAPTER XV.

WEALTH WITH TEARS.

Will fortune never come with both hands full,
But write her fair words still in foulest letters?
She either gives a stomach and no food—
Such are the poor, in health—or else a feast

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And takes away the stomach—such the rich
Who have abundance and enjoy it not.
—SHAKESPEARE.

"Rise up, mist'ess! Oh, for de Lord's sake, rise yourse'f up, and come to marster's room!" pleaded Minty, in a sobbing voice, seeing that her mistress neither moved nor spoke, but stared on her in a stony horror.

To Erma's appalled mind there seemed but one explanation of this calamity—Rodolph Wolfsohn, frenzied by jealousy, had carried his mad threat into execution! He had murdered Clement Gladden! Ah! Heaven have mercy on her soul! Was crime and bloodshed by her nearest and dearest to stain and curse her life forever? Her youth had been darkened and desolated by that greatest and blackest sin. Was it to pursue her like a fate to the end of her life?

She thought sharply, felt deeply, but could neither move nor speak. She could scarcely live and breathe in the grip of the agony that held heart and brain.

"Mist'ess! my mist'ess!" sobbed Minty. "Does yer hear wot I's sayin' to yer? He's dead, my mist'ess! He's dead!"

"Dead! Dead!" echoed Erma, in a hollow, hopeless tone. "Who—who——" her voice died away in a moan.

"De ole marster, mist'ess! De dear, good ole marster!" sobbed Minty, mistaking her question.

"Who—who has done this? Yet, oh! oh! oh!—I know too well!" she added, under her breath.

"Let me help you up, my mist'ess. You look ill. How comed you to sit down dere on de carpet, mist'ess? Let me help you up?" cried Minty, taking her mistress by the hand. In her mental anguish, Erma had forgotten her material injuries and she made an effort to rise, but almost immediately fell back transfixed by acute pain.

"Poor mamma! My poor, dear mamma!" murmured little Rody, tenderly caressing the sufferer.

"My little darling! Oh, my little darling! Have disgrace and misery fallen on your harmless head?" wept Erma, gathering her child to her bosom and shedding abundant tears upon him.

"Poor mamma! Poor, dear mamma!" cooed the child, caressing the weeping woman.

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"Oh, my heart! Oh, my breaking, bleeding heart!" wailed Erma, burying her face on the little, black, curly-haired head.

"My dear mamma!" murmured the child, whose sympathy was large, though his vocabulary was limited.

"Wot is de matter wid you, my mist'ess? Is you sick?" inquired Minty, with tender solicitude.

"I have hurt my foot. Oh, Minty, where is he? Where is he?" inquired Erma, in a voice of agony, giving but short notice to her own personal injuries.

"In his room, my mist'ess. Shall I help you up to go to him?"

"No, not yet! Oh, my breaking heart! Oh, my bursting head! Where is the other one?"

"Which other one, mist'ess?"

"The other one. I cannot name him now. The man who killed Clement Gladden," groaned Erma, with her hands clasped about her head.

Minty stared in astonishment for a few moments, and then answered:

"Nobody killed old marster."

"No!"

"No, mist'ess."

"You told me he was dead!" exclaimed Erma, wild hope struggling with wild fear in her mind and in her face.

"So he is dead, mist'ess. Stark dead in his chair; but nobody never killed him."

"Then half the bitterness of death is past," breathed Erma, with a sigh of infinite relief, hope now gaining the ascendancy over fear.

"Shill I help you up now, mist'ess?"

"Not yet. I ask you again—What has become of the other man?"

"I don't know wot man you mean, mist'ess!"

"The man who was here an hour ago."

"I ain't seed no man, nor likewise heerd of no man, my mist'ess. 'Deed, I dunno wot you 'ludes to, ma'am."

"Can he have gone away without having attempted to put his threat into execution?" she asked herself. Then raising her voice, she said:

"I had a visitor just now. Who let him in?"

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"'Deed I dunno, mist'ess. Jugurtha, he has been waitin' in de hall till 'bout an hour ago, w'en he come runnin' out de back way howlin' 'De ghose! de ghose!' as loud as ebber he could, an' tore away to de quarters, and we ain't seen nuffin' 'tall ob him since!"

"Oh, I understand! I understand!" murmured Erma, to herself. "Old Jugurtha naturally enough took him for a ghost and ran off. And no one else has seen him. He has not stained his soul with murder yet. No! Thank Heaven, he has not! But, oh, my old friend! my dearest, best friend! Is it true that he is gone? No, no, it cannot be so! It must not be so! He has fainted or fallen into a deep sleep, or—or—— Minty!" she suddenly exclaimed, aloud:

"Yes, mist'ess."

"Go and tell Septimus to come here and help me. I cannot rise alone."

"Oh, my mist'ess, Septimus ain't here! I done sent him, post-haste, arter de doctor," replied the woman.

"Aquilo, then. Send Aquilo here. I must go to your master instantly."

"I done sent Quil arter Miss Barbra Gunn," said the woman. "But can't me and Winny Wicket help you, mist'ess?"

"Yes, fetch Winny, and Hinda, too, that she may take charge of the child," said Erma, striving to repress the groans that extreme mental and physical suffering was goading her to utter.

Minty ran out, and soon returned, followed by Winny and Hinda, with faces all wet with tears.

"I have fallen and hurt my ankle. Take me up and set me on a chair, and take up chair and all and carry me into Mr. Gladden's room—— What room is he in?" inquired Erma, breaking off in her directions and turning to Minty.

"He is sitting back in his seat before his writing table, in his study, mist'ess. He had just rung his bell, not half an hour ago, and Quil he run to answer it, and in a minute come running back to say to me that his marster had fainted, or somefin'. And we all, Sept, and Winny, and Hindy—all run into his room, and we found him—past all his pain, mist'ess—dead. Den I comed to tell you,"

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replied Minty, as she lent her aid to Winny and Hinda, in lifting their mistress into a chair.

Erma could put one foot to the ground and rest upon it, but not the other.

"And it was den we sent Sept arter de doctor," said Winny.

"And Quil arter Miss Barbra Gunn," added Hinda.

It took the united strength of the three women to lift the chair with Erma in it and carry it into the study, where, seated before the writing table, with his old purple cashmere dressing gown corded around his waist, and folded over his knees, and with his silver hair and beard flowing over his shoulders and down upon his breast, sat the form of old Clement Gladden, looking natural as in life.

Yet as soon as Erma's eyes fell upon his face, she saw that he had fallen into that last, delicious sleep from which he would never more awake in this material world.

She knew that all was well with him—was best with him. And yet she burst into tears.

She knew that he would presently wake up from that perfect sleep—would wake up, oh, so refreshed and restored! So well, and strong, and young! Would wake up in the higher life, in the presence of the Lord, in the company of angels; in the society of his beloved wife and children, and the cherub of his age, little Fance.

She knew all this right well, and yet she sat by him and took his cold hand and wept as if her heart were breaking —wept as one without hope. So weak is the flesh in the sphere of that power that has dominion over the flesh.

A more peaceful hour would come to her, but it had not yet come. She felt only—death!

"Leave me alone with him," she whispered to her attendants at last.

"But, mist'ess, if you should want anyfing, you can't move," said Minty, in gentle remonstrance.

"Put the handle of the bellcord within my reach, and I will ring when I want you," she replied.

It was Hinda who obeyed this order, and the others prepared to withdraw.

"My—dear—mamma," murmured a little voice at Erma's knee.

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It was the voice of the child, who had followed them all into the room.

"Shall we take Master Rody away wid us?" inquired Hinda.

"No, leave him here," whispered Erma, lifting the little one to her lap.

The servants went out, softly closed the door behind them, and left the mother and child alone with the sleeper.

Then the sphere of the invisible angels of the resurrection began to be perceived, and a strange, holy peace fell upon the scene—a peace that so soothed the spirit of the sorrowful woman as to make her unconscious of physical or mental pain—a marvelously sacred peace—a peace that "passeth all understanding." Sorrow and care, time and space, were lc .t in that benign repose.

Erma never knew how long it had lasted, when at length she was startled by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Winny Wicket, who announced the arrival of Miss Barbra Gunn and Dr. Dutton.

"As good luck would have it, mist'ess, Dr. Dutton he was at De Ma'sh, 'tendin' Adderlyon, wot has got anoder young un, an' so he come right away 'long o' Miss Barbra Gunn. An' Uncle Sept he will hab his ride to Ice Cliff for nuffin'," added Winny, in explanation.

"Where have you left Miss Gunn and the doctor?" inquired Erma, slowly coming back to this world of care like one waking from a deep sleep.

"In de parlor, mist'ess."

"Ask Dr. Dutton to come in here alone, first," said Erma, who shrank from meeting the boisterous amazon just now.

Winny went out, and soon returned, ushering in Dr. Dutton, who entered with a grave, concerned face, holding out his hand and saying, in a low and sympathetic tone:

"My dear Mrs. Wolfsohn."

Erma took his hand, and attempted to speak, but emotion choked her voice. She pointed to a chair. He nodded, and seated himself.

Again Erma attempted to speak, and after a few moments she succeeded.

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"The servants—told you—how they found him—just this way—an hour ago," she said, brokenly.

"Yes. I had expected this. I am grieved, but not surprised. I knew it would be so. So did he. His mortal frame was quite worn out, my dear lady," said the doctor, gently.

"Was—it apoplexy?" inquired Erma, in the same faint, hollow, hesitating voice.

"Oh, dear, no."

"Heart disease?"

"No, he had no disease whatever. He never had one. His life was perfectly healthy, as the life of a man who keeps all the laws of life should be. His death was a perfectly physiological one. I have been expecting it. So had he."

"Oh, why didn't you tell me—prepare me for this? If I had known—oh! if I had known how soon he was to leave us, I would have been—oh, so much more dutiful—so much more attentive to him!" said Erma, in a dying voice, her words broken by profound sighs.

"So we all think and say, my dear lady. Remorse—morbid remorse in many instances—makes up a large portion of our affliction under bereavement. But I do not see, indeed, how you could possibly have been more dutiful or more attentive to your old friend than you have been. You were as a daughter to him."

"Oh, no, no, I never was half good enough, half grateful enough to him for all his great benefits to me and mine! But I would have been if I had known he was going so soon. Oh! if you knew it, Dr. Dutton, why didn't you tell me?"

"My dear Mrs. Wolfsohn, did not you know that he was old and infirm and likely to die?" inquired the doctor, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"I did not know he was going from us so soon. People sometimes live many years after they have grown quite old and infirm. Oh! I did not think of his leaving us so soon—I cannot fully realize it even now. Oh! Look! 'I cannot make him dead!' See! he seems as if he might wake up with a smile any moment."

"He will wake up, and with a smile, no doubt; but not in this sphere," said the doctor, gently.

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"But, oh, if you knew he was going from us, why didn't you tell me, that I might have devoted myself with more earnestness to him!" persisted Erma.

"My dear lady, he would not permit me to do so; he said that 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and he would not permit me to embitter the last days you two would spend together, with the knowledge of his approaching dissolution."

"Yet, oh! if I had only known, I would have been so much more devoted to him!" reiterated Erma.

"Now, Mrs. Wolfsohn, it is well with him; but it is not well with you. Your servants tell me that you have injured your ankle so seriously as to be unable to walk, or put it to the ground. I am sure it must give you pain."

"Yes, since you mention it, I think it does pain me; but I had not noticed it before."

Nor had she done so. The sharper pain of Rodolph Wolfsohn's contemptuous abandonment had deadened all sense of the lighter physical uneasiness.

"I must look to it," said Dr. Dutton.

Erma rang the hand bell and summoned Winny Wicket.

"Stay here to wait on the doctor. He is about to examine my injured ankle," said Erma, as the housekeeper presented herself.

The result of the physician's examination was the discovery that the bone was broken.

"I shall have to order you to bed immediately, Mrs. Wolfsohn. And you must lie there until I give you leave to get up. I must set the bone, and you must keep still until it is firmly knit," said Dr. Dutton, as he tenderly wrapped up the ankle in temporary coverings and then rang the bell.

Hinda and Minty both appeared in answer to it.

Erma was conveyed upstairs and put to bed by the three women, leaving Dr. Dutton to make an examination of the body in the chair.

An hour later Erma's broken ankle was set, splintered and bandaged, and she herself was sleeping under the influence of a narcotic and watched over by Miss Barbra Gunn, who took up her abode in the house and assumed the direction of affairs until the funeral should be over.

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CHAPTER XVI.

NEW LIFE.

Oh, hearts that never cease to yearn!
  Oh, brimming tears that ne'er are dried!
The dead, though they depart, return
  As though they ne'er had died!

The living are the only dead;
  The dead live, never more to die;
And often when we mourn them fled,
  They never were so nigh.

Oh, why should Memory, veiled with gloom,
  And like a sorrowing mourner craped,
Sit weeping o'er an empty tomb,
  Whose captive has escaped?

'Tis but a mound, and will be mossed
  Whene'er the summer grass appears;
The loved, though wept, are never lost;
  We only lose—our tears!

—ANON.

The funeral was fixed for the following Sunday. All the neighborhood was present to do honor to the memory of the most beloved and respected man in the county. But Erma could not leave her bed. She never again saw the mortal face of her old friend. She was weak enough to shed many bitter tears over this deprivation; and while the funeral ceremonies were going on below stairs, she lay on her back, trying to recall Clement Gladden's living face, as she had seen it opposite to herself at the breakfast table that fatal morning just before the sudden appearance of Rodolph Wolfsohn and the sudden death of Clement Gladden.

Then she found that she could recall the fine, benign, patriarchal countenance. And then she tried to recollect his last words to herself—the very last that he had ever spoken to her. And she did remember them with comfort, if not even with joy. They were a benediction. He hardly ever said "good-by" to anyone without adding "God bless you."

On that fatal morning he had risen from the breakfast table and said:

"I am going to take a little walk around the farm, my dear. I shall be back again before dinner." Then he had

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paused and looked at her a few moments, and then suddenly took his hat and added: "Well, good-morning, God bless you, my dear!"

Yes, "God bless you!" Those had been his last words to her, and she was glad.

What had been her last words to him? She recollected them easily, coming after his. Why, if she had known that this was to be their last meeting and parting on earth, she could not have uttered more appropriate words.

"God bless you, too, dearest Uncle Clement! God love and bless you abundantly for all your tender mercy and loving kindness to me and mine, as I know He does and He will."

The memory of these mutual benedictions was now a comfort to her, as she lay alone and helpless on her bed, and listened to the muffled funeral sounds in the crowded rooms and halls below, on that solemn Sunday afternoon when the mortal remains of Clement Gladden were to be carried forth from Brighthome, followed by a long procession of friends and neighbors, in carriages and on foot, and conveyed to Ice Cliff, and laid in the venerable old cemetery of St. James Church beside those of his beloved wife and children and his little angel, Fance.

After the services at the cemetery were over the funeral company returned, as was the custom of the county, to the house of mourning.

Refreshments were provided for them in the drawing room, where Mr. Joseph Drummond, the family solicitor, announced that on the next morning—Monday morning—according to the instructions of the testator, he should read the last will and testament of the late Clement Gladden to all such of his friends and neighbors as should please to present themselves in time.

Nearly all within the hearing of his words promised to attend the reading of the will, for much speculation was abroad as to how Mr. Gladden—who had not a real blood relation in the world—had left his property.

Mrs. Blantyre and her children, and many others, called him uncle; but in fact he had no nieces or nephews; Susan Blantyre's first husband, Eustace Fleetwood, senior, had been Mr. Gladden's wife's brother—hence the fiction of kinship. He had adopted the little Fance, and had she

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continued to live in the flesh she would have inherited, through his will, nearly the whole of his vast estate; but she had preceded him to the higher life, and since her departure he had made another will—that which was to be read on the following day.

After the guests had partaken of the good things laid before them, and had listened to the announcement of the lawyer, and made their comments and conjectures thereon, they prepared for departure.

The ladies present went up to Erma's sick room to bid her good-by.

Among them was Miss Barbra Gunn, who was wonderfully subdued by the solemn services of the day.

"I suppose you will leave Brighthome as soon as you are able to be moved, my dear child—indeed, I know you must. There is no alternative, as it will pass into other hands after the will is read—though into whose no one can yet tell; but what I wished to say to you was, that The Marsh is heartily open to you. I hope you will come to me, and to no one else," she said, stooping over the bedside to whisper to Erma.

"Thanks, my dear Miss Gunn. I will bear your kind offer in mind, in case I should have to quit Brighthome," replied Erma, gently and gratefully.

"In case you should have to leave Brighthome! Why, my dear, of course you will have to leave! You can't stay here with strangers," said Miss Gunn.

"No, of course not," Erma admitted.

"Then you must come to me at The Marsh. Good-by, my dear. Keep up a brave heart," concluded Miss Barbra, who, in her deep mourning for little Fance, came to the bedside, stooped, and whispered:

"I expect Russell home to-morrow evening, dear Erma, but I shall run over in the morning to hear the will read, and if you can be moved I shall carry you and Rody home with me. Good-night, my dear. Heaven bless you and keep you!"

And before Erma could reply, the kind-hearted woman had slipped away, and Mrs. Morset stood in her place to say good-by, but not to offer any lengthened hospitalities.

So one after the other the lady friends took leave of Erma, and went their way.

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After commotion comes calm, and that night Erma slept the dreamless sleep of fatigue.

Early the next morning Lawyer Drummond presented himself at Brighthome, with the will in his pocket.

But early as it was, Miss Barbra Gunn and Mrs. Blantyre were there to receive him.

"Where is Mrs. Wolfsohn? It is most desirable that she should be present when the seals are broken," said Mr. Drummond, after the ceremonious salutations of the morning had been passed between the ladies and himself.

"Don't you know that she is confined to her bed with a broken ankle?" demanded Miss Barbra.

"I heard that she had received a slight injury, but did not suppose it would keep her in her room to-day," answered the lawyer.

"Keep her in her room! Why, man, it keeps her in her bed! Her ankle bone is broken!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, looking contemptuously upon the solicitor.

"Indeed, I regret to hear that her injury was so serious. The seals of this document should certainly be broken in her presence," answered Mr. Drummond.

"Then it will have to be done in her room, and by her bedside."

"Yes—it might be so—that would do."

"I will go and see to it," said Miss Barbra, hurrying off upstairs to Erma's presence.

"You see, my dear child, you need not mind old Joe Drummond. He has been the family solicitor, and, for that matter, the neighborhood solicitor, for forty years or more. And as for the rest of us who may invade your room, we are all old friends," said the old lady, when she had explained the nature of her errand.

"I do not mind at all. Please ring for Hinda to put the room to rights, and then let them come," replied Erma.

"I don't think that the room needs any putting to rights. It looks as clean and neat as a new bandbox," said Miss Gunn, as she arose and gave the bell a vigorous pull.

The summoned girl came at once, and being directed by her mistress, mended the bright little wood fire rendered necessary by the coolness of the September morn-

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ing, swept up the clean red hearth, straightened the neat rug, smoothed the snowy draperies about the bed, arranged the folds of the white window curtains, and wiped off the pure, polished surfaces of tables, chairs and stands.

"That's what I call 'painting the lily and adding perfume to the violets,'" said Miss Barbra, contemptuously.

Hinda, having finished cleaning the clean and brightening the bright, turned to leave the room, when Miss Gunn stopped her, and said:

"You go and tell Mr. Drummond and Mrs. Blantyre, who are in the drawing room, that they may come up here now and bring any others of the neighbors who may have arrived."

"Yes'm," respectfully replied the girl, as she left to obey.

In a few moments many steps were heard ascending the stairs, and soon the room was filled with friends, who at first came with kindly greetings to the bedside of the invalid, and then sought seats on the sofa, and chairs, and even window sills and foot stools in the room.

Among them were all the Morsets, all the Bibbs, both the Lambes, and even the little Fleetwoods, together with the Rev. Dr. Cleveland and Dr. Dutton.

Lawyer Drummond stood on the rug, with his back to the fire, stooping over a little table that he had dragged before him to accommodate his documents, his spectacles and even his hands when he required to rest them upon it.

When all the company were seated around him in curiosity and breathless expectation, Lawyer Drummond solemnly broke the three red seals of the parchment, unfolded the leaves, and began to read, with the usual formula:

"In the name of God, amen—I, Gabriel Clement Gladden, of Brighthome," etc., etc. It is not needful to quote the whole testament, for it was lengthy, the testator, with childlike meekness and simplicity, seeming to think it necessary to explain or apologize for every disposition he made of his own property, as if he had not had the right to do as he pleased with it.

In the second clause he set all his negroes free, and left each one a small legacy to support declining age or to begin life with, apologizing for this act by explaining that,

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though he had held them in life, he could not leave them, after his death, exposed to the terrible vicissitudes and sufferings of slavery, which even the kindest masters could not always prevent, nor could he continue and perhaps perpetuate their condition of servitude to unborn generations; so he felt constrained to free them, even though in doing so he should, to that extent, impoverish his heirs. And, in freeing them, he felt obliged to provide for them, both because they had some moral right to a little of the wealth they had helped to accumulate, and because they must not be sent away from their long service empty handed, and exposed to all the temptations of destitution.

"That's Clemmy Gladden all over!" exclaimed Miss Barbra Gunn, interrupting the reading without ceremony. "That's Clemmy Gladden all over! Good heart, but no head at all! Now these freed niggers, as soon as ever they get their legacies, will all go on a big drunk, until they have squandered everything, and then fetch up at the workhouse or the county jail!"

"But you see the property left them consists of little log huts, little garden plots, cows, and pigs, and poultry," mildly suggested the lawyer.

"They'll turn it all into money and drink it up, and then live by sheep stealing and henroost robbing."

"Let us hope not, madam," said the lawyer, and he resumed the reading of the will.

There were handsome legacies left to Susan Blantyre and to the Fleetwood children, with the usual apology and explanation, that these were only left as an expression of good will and affection, the testator knowing that they were already abundantly rich from the fortune left them by their father.

There were some other legacies, and then the bulk of his property, comprising the Brighthome estate, was left to Erma, widow of the late Rodolph Wolfsohn, for the term of her natural life, and after her, to Rodolph Wolfsohn, son of the said Erma and of the late Rodolph Wolfsohn—with the following apology and explanation: that the testator would have preferred to leave Brighthome to his esteemed young friend, Erma Wolfsohn, without conditions, but that he feared some delicate scruple might

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prevent her from accepting and holding it and compel her to yield it up to some one else whom she might imagine to possess a greater claim to the estate. Therefore he had left it to her for her life, and in trust for her son, so that she could not alienate it.

Such, divested of its wilderness and labyrinths of law terms, was the purport of the will of Clement Gladden.

It took away the breath of all hearers. No one could speak for astonishment, and no one was more dumfounded with amazement than Erma, who lay gazing at the old lawyer as he stood bending over the table and folding up the will—gazing at him as if her eyes might bring her some understanding of the case that her ears had failed to catch.

The only totally indifferent person in the crowd was the fortunate young heir himself, who sat upon the carpet, perfectly happy in the possession of that old annual, "Heath's Book of Beauty," that he had taken from the side table, and was now improving the occasion of his being unobserved by tearing it to pieces.

Miss Barbra Gunn was the first of the astounded company to recover her faculties.

"Well, I am sure, Erma, my dear, I congratulate you with all my heart. No one in the county needed this good fortune more than you did—though it has taken us all by surprise to see a whole neighborhood of old friends passed over and everything left to you, a comparative stranger, and tied up so, too, that you can't get rid of it. However, as I said before, I do congratulate you with all my heart, and the boy, too, though little he seems to care, little scamp. He thinks a deal more of that old 'Book of Beauty' than he does of Brighthome, you may take my word."

After Miss Barbra had so broken the spell of silence, other friends came around Erma with hearty congratulations, all of which she received with much humility and perplexity, for she could not yet understand or believe in her good fortune. And, oh, besides, what was fortune to her whose heart was breaking under its burden of grief?

Yet she meekly thanked her neighbors for their sympathy.

"There is no need for being officious in pressing hos-

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pitality upon you now, dear Erma. You have a more delightful home than most of us; yet, when you are able to ride I would like you to come and spend as much time as you can spare with us," said Susan Blantyre, cordially.

"And spoil your *tête-à-tête* with Capt. Blantyre after his long absence? I keep forgetting his new rank and calling him captain, from habit, though I have heard he has risen grade by grade in the army, until he was mustered out as brevet brigadier-general. I thank you all the same, dear Susan; but I cannot spoil your second honeymoon," replied Erma, with a gentle smile that was sadder than a sigh.

Other cordial invitations followed, and then the company began to take leave.

"At what hour do you expect Capt.—I mean Gen. Blantyre?" inquired Erma, as she detained the hand of Susan in her own at parting.

"Oh, call him captain, my dear! That is a young title. If you call him general, I shall think he is seventy years old. He is coming down by the afternoon coach to Ice Cliff, and I am going to meet him. I shall take the children home, and go on in the carriage to the Old Red Fox to meet him there."

"But will not a meeting in a public place be very unsatisfactory? I should wait for him at home, I think," said Erma.

"Well, a public meeting would be undesirable; but you see I shall reach the Red Fox an hour or two before the coach is expected, and I shall engage a private parlor and order supper and be ready to give the returning soldier a warm welcome and a cosy *tête-à-tête* before we set out for the long ride between the Red Fox and our house. Now I must be off! Good-by, my darling! Heaven bless you in your delightful home!" exclaimed the warm-hearted woman, pressing a kiss upon the lips of Erma.

When the neighbors had all gone, Erma called little Rody to her side, and when the child had eagerly dropped his toys and clambered to her arms, she pressed him to her heart, murmuring:

"Oh, my darling! we would give it all—all! for one loving word from your father!"

"Ah, Heaven!" she thought, "who has poisoned his

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mind against us? Who? Who? And, oh! where has he gone? Where? I do not know, and I dare not ask! No one has seen him, or they would surely have spoken to me of him! It seems very strange, but no one could have seen him, else they would certainly have mentioned the circumstances! And I dare not breathe of his sudden arrival and departure to anyone lest they should think I had gone crazy, and had only imagined the whole transaction! And sometimes I myself am inclined to suspect it was a dream! So like a phantom has he come and gone! Even old Jugurtha took him for a ghost, and has been ridiculed and laughed to scorn for his story ever since! No, I can never make any inquiries, even if there was a hope of gaining any information concerning him! If I were to ask anyone: 'Have you seen or heard anything of my husband?' they would think my troubles had turned my brain; and if they had seen or heard of him they would not wait for me to ask! No, I must bear this frightful uncertainty alone. What? Could I tell anyone of his abrupt appearance before me, his base suspicions, his degrading charges, and his angry and violent departure—could I tell these? Oh, no, no! not even to Susan Blantyre! I must bear the terrible burden alone, and I must patiently wait events. Oh! where is he now? When shall I see him again? Will he return? And when? Oh, Rodolph! Rodolph! how could you imagine such evil things against me! Oh! it was because of the one secret I withheld from you. If you were only here now, by my side, I could tell you all, everything, and leave no shadow of a secret between us."

Such was the sad tenor of her thoughts while she held her boy to her bosom and kissed him through her tears.

She was interrupted by the entrance of Winny Wicket, who came to make a complaint of Jugurtha.

"Can't get no good out of old Jug, since ebber he seen dat ghost—if he did see any ghost!" said the old woman, at the end of a long tirade.

A sudden inspiration came to Erma. This old man, who had seen the visitor, might give some clew to his whereabouts, if judiciously questioned.

"Send Jugurtha to me. I will talk to him," she said.

"Do, mist'ess! Talk to dat ole sinner good!" exclaimed

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Winny Wicket, excitedly. "Talk to him good, mist'ess. I do 'clar' to my 'Vine Marster, I nebber was so nigh fallin' from grace in my life as I has been widin' de las' free or four days along o' dat ole sinner an' his carryin's on. It's a putty fing, too, for me, as has been a faithful sister ob de meetin' house for more'n forty years, to fall from grace de fust time, on account o' he, now wouldn't it?"

"Send him up to me directly, Winny, and I will see what I can do with him," said the lady.

Winny left the room triumphantly, in the thought that she had succeeded in bringing the offender to justice at last.

In a few moments she returned, ushering in the culprit, with these words:

"Now, den, you hoary-haired ole sinner, go gib an account ob yourse'f to your mist'ess. You ought to be 'shame' ob yourse'f, you ought. You, wid your white head a-bloomin' an' a-blossomin' for de grabe. 'Shame' o' yerse'f, to fall from grace an' make odder people fall, too! Wot yer 'spect Brudder Jehial gwine to say to you nex' class meetin'?"

"Never mind, Winny, leave him to me. I must talk to him alone," said Erma, to stop this jeremiad.

"Yes, mist'ess, which I hope you will talk to him good," said Winny, as with a disappointed face at not being permitted to behold Jugurtha's expected humiliation, she reluctantly withdrew from the room.

"Come here, Uncle Jugurtha," said the lady, gently.

The old, white-haired negro approached in the most humble and deferential manner, and stood before his mistress in a crestfallen and deprecating attitude.

"Sit down in that armchair, Uncle Jugurtha, and do not look so distressed; I am not angry with you," said Erma, gently, as she pointed to the big chair that stood at the head of her bed.

"I hopes not, 'deed, I hopes not; 'cause I couldn't help of it to sabe my life; I didn't do nuffin' to rise it out'n its grabe; no, nor likewise did I want to see it," said the old man, as he meekly took the indicated seat.

Little Rody unclasped his arms from his mother's neck, slipped down off the bed, clambered up on the knees of

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the old negro, and began to comfort him by patting his face and cooing:

"Poor Untle Jugurtha! Poor Untle Jugurtha!"

"What are you talking about?" said Erma, gently, to draw him out.

"De ghos', honey! De ghos' wot 'peared to me in de front passidge to warn me ob de ole marster's deff, on de werry day he died," said the old man, turning pale-gray and shuddering.

"Are you sure it was a ghost?" inquired Erma, with a faint smile.

"Hi, honey, wot I tell you? Sure it was a ghos'! I both seed it and I heerd it. I seed it come right into de front door, and I heerd it ax me, 'Is your marster home?' De ole marster he meant, honey, which he had come for him, yer know, and which de ole marster died de same day. But I was so scared I didn't do nuffin' but p'int to de parlor an' run for my life; for, oh! my mist'ess, he did look so awful—his face like white ashes, an' his eyes like flames of fire!" whispered the old man, in an awe-stricken voice, and with all the exaggeration of terror.

"Jugurtha, might he not have been your master in person, and not in the spirit?" suggested Erma.

"Who, he? No, my mist'ess; how could it be marster, when marster's done dead an' gone ebber so long ago?"

"But sometimes people reported dead turn up alive."

"Not dis one, dough, my mist'ess. Dis was a ghos'. If I hadn't a-knowed dis was his ghos' soon's ebber I saw him. 'Side w'ch, if it had been him, w'ere is he now?" pertinently inquired the old man.

Erma could not answer that, nor could she, on the other hand, desist from her interrogations. Something might come of her questions, she thought.

"Uncle Jugurtha," she inquired, "has anyone else in the neighborhood seen anything of this 'ghost'?"

"No, my mist'ess, not a soul. Wish dey had, den maybe dey wouldn't redicule me so much; 'tending like it was nuffin' 'tall but my own dementianation."

"Uncle Jugurtha, perhaps you might find out by inquiring that some one else had seen this 'ghost.' You know you might put it this way by asking people if they

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had seen anyone that looked like—that reminded them—of your Master Rodolph."

"Wot, mist'ess! An' be called a wuss old fool dan dey call me now? No, mist'ess, I better not. 'Side w'ch, de ghos' nebber 'peared to nobody but me, here in dis house. An' he 'peared here to warn us ob de deff of de ole marster wot died dat same day."

"But, for all that, I wish you would inquire if anyone resembling your master has been seen in the neighborhood. You might get at the bottom of the mystery in that way and find out that some one resembling your master had been playing tricks to frighten you," persisted Erma.

"Well, my mist'ess, I'll 'quire, to please you, dough I know dey'll all call me a ole moonatic for my pains."

At this moment there came a smart rap at the chamber door.

"Come in," said the lady.

The door opened and the boy, Aquilo, appeared.

"Well, what is wanted?" inquired his mistress.

"If you please, ma'am, dere is a werry strange ole gemman in de parlor."

"A gentleman? What does he want?"

"He wants to see you, ma'am."

"Who is he? Did you not tell him that I was confined to my bed?"

"Yes'm; but he said you would see him, whether or no."

"Who is he?"

"I dunno, ma'am; but he sent you his card," said the boy, handing the piece of pasteboard.

Erma glanced at the engraved name, and uttered a half-repressed cry.

The sight of that name would once have blanched her cheeks to marble.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOY.

You come in such a time
As if propitious fortune took a care
To calm my tide of woe, at its full height.

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But joy is such a foreigner,
So mere a stranger to my thoughts, I know
Not how to entertain him—am perplexed—
For still there is something
That checks this joy!—nor can I yet distinguish
Which is an apparition, this, or that.
—Sir J. Denham.

Joy lighted up the face of Erma. She raised herself on her elbow to read the name upon the card in a fuller light, lest hope should have mocked her with illusion.

"Oh, yes! It is true! It is true! Oh, I thank Heaven! I thank Heaven! Yes! bring the gentleman up at once, Aquilo! Bring him to my bedside," she exclaimed, half crazed with delight.

The boy went out, with his great, round eyes staring straight before him in amazement, so that he forgot to make his usual bow of exit, or even to close the door behind him.

Erma sank back on her pillow and clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven, breathing fervently:

"Oh, Lord, I thank thee! I thank thee for this great mercy!"

A few minutes passed, and then Aquilo returned to the room, ushering in the stranger.

He was a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking man of middle age, with a bald crown and fine sable-silvered hair and beard framing in a face of the noble Roman type—with lofty forehead, eagle eyes, aquiline nose, short upper lip and rounded-up, protruding chin. He wore a suit of gray tweed and carried a broad-brimmed, gray, felt hat in his hand. The top of his head was balder, his face paler and more worn, his shoulders more bowed and his gait more feeble than would have beseemed a man of double his age.

As he crossed the threshold, Erma started and held out her arms in eager, yearning, loving welcome, breathing deeply forth the sighing sounds.

"My father! oh, my father! free at last! vindicated at last! Oh, I could die of gratitude now! I could give my life as a thank offering!"

By this time he had reached her, stooped over her, and his neck was encircled by her arms, and his head was folded to her bosom.

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"My own dear daughter! My faithful, devoted daughter! It is like getting into heaven to come to you in this way—vindicated, free, with nothing to regret and nothing to conceal," he exclaimed, fervently returning her caresses.

"How pale you are, dearest dear! How very pale and worn! Oh! you have suffered so much, and so unjustly! But now your trials are over forever," she said, gazing fondly in the handsome, pallid face when he had gently withdrawn from her embrace and seated himself in the chair by her side, still holding one of her hands.

"All over for the present, at least, my dear girl," he answered, pressing the little fingers that he held.

"And you will never leave me more, my father?"

"Never, my dearest child!"

"Oh, how much I have to ask you!" she exclaimed.

"And how much I also have to learn from you!" he answered, with a smile.

She had never taken her eyes off him since he had entered the room. Now, with her gaze still riveted on his face as if she feared to lose sight of it for an instant, she suddenly recollected something, and said:

"Oh, here I am—all words and no deeds—forgetting that you need refreshment."

Then sending her glance around the room in search of Quil, she detected him standing in the doorway and staring at the stranger, with his eyes and his mouth wide open, and she exclaimed:

"Aquilo, this gentleman is my father, and henceforth your master. Go now and tell Winny Wicket to prepare a nice luncheon immediately. Then return here and set a table by my bedside."

The boy plucked his forelock, bowed and vanished.

"Father," she murmured, with the most tender accent on the beloved name, "father, dearest, I do not wish to let you out of my sight for a moment, for fear I should find it all a dream. You can take your lunch by my bedside, can you not, dear?"

"Yes, my child. Yes, my darling girl, and I would rather do it. I am as unwilling to take my eyes off your sweet face as you can be to have me go."

"Do you want to wash your hands and brush your hair,

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dear father? Go to my wash stand and dressing table at the other end of the room and do it. You will not mind me, your child?"

"No, dear, not at all, considering the long years of your childhood, during which I used to wash hands and face, comb hair and shave beard in the sight of my little girl," replied the stranger, with a smile, as he arose and went to the wash stand and threw off his coat.

Aquilo came back, and set a little, round table beside his mistress' bed, and spread a clean white damask cloth over it.

"Oh, I have so many, many questions to ask you, dear father! But I will not yet—not until you are thoroughly refreshed and rested," said Erma, half impatiently, half resignedly.

"And I have as long a catechism for you, my love," replied the visitor.

"Aunt Winny Wicket want to know, mist'ess, wedder you will hab a cole lunch sarve now, or wedder you will have a hot one got ready as soon as she can get it?" inquired Aquilo, after he had arranged the table and was about to leave the room.

"Father," said Erma, passing the question on, "which would you prefer—a cold lunch now, or a hot one half an hour hence?"

"A cold one now, my dear, so that we can get it over and have a talk," replied the stranger, who was briskly wiping his face and head with a crash towel, after having thoroughly bathed them in cold water.

The order was given, and the boy left the room to execute it.

A tempting repast, considering it was a cold one, was soon laid upon the table—ham and tongue, chicken and turkey, fresh butter and light biscuits, pickles, sweetmeats, cakes, fruit, and, lastly, a bottle of that Chablis wine that had been presented to Erma by Gen. Bibb two years before.

Otho Herne, who had now got through his toilet, drew a chair to the table, and sat down.

"What shall I give you, dear?" he inquired, as he began to slice the breast of the turkey.

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"Nothing, dear father. I had taken a bowl of beef tea just before your entrance," she replied.

"Beef tea! And that is an invalid's diet! They told me below that you were confined to the bed with a hurt ankle. That should not take away your appetite, child. Is the hurt serious? Is it a sprain?" anxiously inquired Mr. Herne.

"It is a fracture," said Erma.

"'A fracture!'" echoed Mr. Herne, in surprise and anxiety.

"Yes; but really not a serious one. I have to keep the limb still, that is all."

"'That is all!' How did it happen? They told me that you had slipped and fallen on the waxed floor. Was that so?"

"Yes, I did slip and fall on the waxed floor," said Erma, blushing deeply with the consciousness that she was suppressing half the truth, and thus giving a false impression.

"These waxed floors that you have here in the South are a fearful nuisance. I wonder more limbs are not broken than there seem to be," said Mr. Herne, as he went on with his lunch.

After all, he ate but sparingly, and soon laid down his knife and fork, and pushed back his plate.

"Take the service away, Aquilo, and then bring Master Rody in," said the lady, in a low voice.

The boy gathered plates and dishes, forks and spoons, on a large waiter, folded and laid the tablecloth and napkin upon them, and set back the table in its place against the wall. Lastly, he took up the heavily laden waiter, and left the room.

"Who is Rody?" inquired Mr. Herne, smiling archly, as soon as he was left alone with his daughter.

"A little pet of mine that I wish to introduce to you," said Erma, with a responsive smile.

Aquilo entered in due time leading the child by the hand.

But as soon as the two entered the room Rody broke from his attendant and rushed to his mother.

"Kiss that gentleman's hand, Rody, he is your grandfather," said the young mother, with a proud glance at the visitor.

"His grandfather? What! this fine little fellow my

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grandson? Your son, Erma? Well, I had not thought of him. I really had not, although I might naturally have done so, for I did hear of his existence very lately," said Mr. Herne, lifting the child to his knees.

From sheer shyness, Rody had disobeyed his mother in omitting to kiss his grandfather's hand, and now he sat upon the stranger's lap and gazed into his face, taking stock of his character in a child's frank and infallible way.

Erma smiled with a mother's pride on both.

"What is your name, my little man?" inquired the elderly gentleman.

"Ody," answered the boy, without removing his eyes from their searching gaze.

"Ody, is it? Why, Erma, he must be near two years old, yet I did not dream of this as a likelihood when I left you so unceremoniously about that time," exclaimed Mr. Herne, turning to the young mother.

"No, nor did I. You left in October. Rody came to comfort me in the March following. He is now about eighteen months old."

"Oh, I see! He is a well-grown boy, for that age, and very forward."

"Only children are apt to be forward—they are so much with grown people and they receive so much attention. Yet there was a gentleman here last week who took Ody to be but a year old."

"He could not have known much about children, then, whoever he was. Who was he, pray?" inquired Mr. Herne.

Erma hesitated and reflected. Should she tell her father of Rodolph Wolfsohn's sudden return and sudden desertion of her ? No! She could not darken the first day of his arrival in her house by such a tale. She answered, with assumed indifference:

"Oh, a gentleman friend, who called to see us. But, father, tell me about yourself. Did you see the advertisements I caused to be put in all the papers, cautiously worded, to recall you home?"

"Yes, I saw them at last, months after they had first appeared, I suppose."

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"Why did you not see them earlier—nine months ago, in fact, when they were first published?"

"I was too far out of the way, my dear. Stay! I had better give you a little sketch of my career since I saw you last."

"Yes, dear, do, and put that heavy boy off your knees, and lie down on the sofa and rest while you talk—do."

"Thanks, love, but I rest quite well where I am. This is a luxurious chair, don't you know? And as for putting my grandson off my knee, not I, indeed. He is too great a novelty to be spared yet a while."

"Well, then, father dear, put him down as soon as he wearies you."

"I will—put him down as soon as he wearies me, but that will not be yet a while."

"And go on with your story, father dear."

"Yes. Well, then, it was in October two years ago that I left you."

"Near the last of the month—yes."

"I managed to make my way to New Orleans, where I remained in safe disguise all winter. There I shipped as a common sailor on board of a merchantman bound for Portland. I engaged only for the voyage. At Portland I had intended to take passage for Liverpool, but on arriving there I found a whaler about to sail for the coast of Greenland. This offered a surer city of refuge than the other, and so I shipped myself on board the whaler for the Arctic voyage."

"Oh, my dear father!" breathed Erma, in a tone of the deepest compassion.

"My love, I liked it! I should have liked it, even if I had not been a fugitive from justice."

"A fugitive from injustice, dear father," put in Erma, earnestly.

"Well," laughed Herne, "I should have liked the Arctic voyage, even if I had not been a fugitive from injustice flying for liberty. I liked the idea of the voyage, and I liked the realization of that idea. It did not disappoint me. The voyage did me good. It braced me up. You do not wish to hear all the particulars of my Arctic voyage—do you, Erma? I warn you it would consume several weeks and fill two royal octavo volumes."

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"Oh, no, not now; but some time, surely, in the long winter evenings, when snow and ice, high winds and intense cold bring the Arctic regions back to you in fancy, and we gather all around our glorious hickory wood fires; then you shall tell me of ice-bound ships, glaciers, bears, aurora borealis, midnight sun, Esquimaux, and all the rest of it. Now keep to the strictly personal interests of your own life."

"Well, my dear, the voyage was one of the most prosperous and successful that had ever been made in these unpropitious regions. It was a voyage scarcely equalled in the memory of the oldest salt; a voyage that will become traditional and seem fabulous for its unexampled prosperity."

"Yet it was long," said Erma.

"'Long?' It was one of the shortest whaling voyages on record. It lasted but sixteen months. We sailed for the coast of Greenland on the first of April."

"All Fools' Day!" smiled Erma.

"Yes, All Fools' Day! Perhaps that was the reason why we were so lucky. 'A fool for luck' is an old proverb, you know. Well, we sailed for Greenland, as I said, on the first of April, 1847, and after the most fortunate voyage ever made, rich in oil and ivory, on the fifteenth of August, 1848, we sailed for home. We reached Portland late in September. There I got sight of the New York papers, and saw your carefully worded advertisement. By the way, it was well that you persevered in keeping in those advertisements against all odds and discouragements."

"Oh, yes! I thank Heaven that I was led to persist in that. Though, indeed, after I had kept them standing for nearly two years without any good result, I did feel disheartened and almost ready to give up," said Erma, with a smile and a sigh.

"And if you had, I should still have been a miserable, self-exiled fugitive from——"

"Injustice, dear father."

"Well, from injustice, then—ignorant that anything had occurred to vindicate my character. But when I read and understood your notice, I got my discharge, received my pay, put myself into citizen's dress, and took passage

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for New York. Arrived in the city of my woes, I called on Bishop Whiting, where I learned the first tidings of my home that I had heard for nearly two years. I heard, my dear child—I heard with the deepest pity that you had been widowed within a few months after your marriage, that your husband had fallen in an encounter with the Indians of the plains, and that his whole company had been massacred; and that this tragedy must have occurred while I was living on your estate as overseer, although the dreadful intelligence did not reach you until long afterward. It was a severe affliction, my child. I would to Heaven I could have been near you then, to have comforted you."

Erma's head drooped, her bosom heaved, and her eyes filled with tears—not for the loss of her husband—since he was not lost—but for his degrading suspicion and cruel abandonment of herself.

"Pass to some other subject, dear father," she said, in a low and shaking voice.

"The bishop told me all the particulars of the reappearance of Gustave Perlemonte—his masquerading at Darkwood as your overseer, and his cruel ejection of you and your child from Darkwood. He told me, further, of old Mr. Clement Gladden's noble and generous conduct in coming to your rescue then by taking you both to Brighthome, where you became the governess of little Fance Fleetwood."

"Yes, father. Oh, father, you know the world—you can tell me truly—was there anything improper in my going to Brighthome to earn my own and my child's bread by teaching little Fance Fleetwood?"

Mr. Herne looked at his daughter for a few moments in silent doubt, and then said:

"I don't understand you, Erma. What did you say?"

"Was there anything—very—scandalous—in my going to Brighthome as little Fance Fleetwood's governess?" repeated Erma.

"Why, no! How on earth should there have been? What put such an idea into your head, child?"

"There was no lady at the head of Mr. Gladden's household when I entered it," said Erma.

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"Well, what of that, except that there was so much the more need of your going there?"

"It was the establishment of a single man—a widower."

"Oh-h-h! I begin to see what you mean. Well—humph!—if Clement Gladden had been a young widower, it would not have been discreet in him to have taken a youthful widow in his house in any capacity, whether as governess for his little ward, or as housekeeper; but Clement Gladden, the life-long friend of Bishop Whiting, was nearly seventy-five years of age, with an unblemished reputation from his youth up. His character was known to all your neighbors, and you were known to all your neighbors. No, my dear, there would not have been a shade of impropriety in your accepting the situation of governess in his house. Has anyone dared to hint that there was?" demanded Otho Herne, with his eyes kindling in wrath.

"I do not know, dear father. I only feared that some one might have thought or said that I was imprudent. And you know that I am sensitive on such subjects."

"Set your mind at rest. No one could be such a fool as to criticise you on such a subject. I should not like to hear of anyone having done so."

"Father, dear," interrupted Erma, "we have drifted away from your story. You were telling me of your having reached New York and seen Bishop Whiting——"

"Who gave me the first news I had received of my child for two years."

"Father, you know you never gave me your address in any of the letters that you wrote to me previous to your going on that whaling voyage. There was not even a postmark on any of them to guide me how to write to you. They all seemed to be drop letters."

"My dear, you could not have written to me with safety, nor did I wish you to do so. I had to use a great deal of *finesse* in writing to you. I wrote but a few vague lines in a feigned hand, without date, greeting or signature, inclosed my note in an envelope, and directed it just to your name, without any address. This I inclosed again in a letter to the postmaster at Ice Cliff, requesting him, if he knew the address of the lady to whom the inclosed was directed, to send it to her. Of course, honest Nelson

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popped the sealed letter into your box, whence it was delivered to your post messenger."

"That explains it," said Erma.

"Not quite all; for not one of these letters did I send through the New Orleans post office. I sometimes traveled a hundred miles by rail, and ten or fifteen on foot, to mail a letter from some obscure post office in another State or Territory, and never twice in the same direction. After I had gone North in the spring, I traveled into the interior of Maine to post my last letter to you from an obscure hamlet with a hard name, which I have forgotten. That letter was the last I wrote to you."

"Yes, it told me that the writer was well, and on the eve of a long absence, and that I must not be anxious. Since then I have never heard a word of you, until I saw your face this morning."

"When I came in answer to your advertisement."

"Now go on. We are always digressing," said Erma, with a smile. "Now let us get back to Bishop Whiting, who was giving you the first news you had heard of me since you sailed for the Arctic Ocean."

"Well, he told me all he knew; that the little child angel, Fance Fleetwood, with whose lovely spirit he seemed perfectly familiar from your correspondence, had gone to heaven, and your occupation was over, but that you remained at Brighthome for the present, as the guest of Mr. Gladden, who was declining very fast."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CALUMNY.

This world with calumny abounds;
The whitest virtue slander wounds;
There are, whose joy is, night and day,
To talk a character away. —POPE.

Be silent and beware if such you see;
'Tis defamation but to say—"That's he!"
—DRYDEN.

"Father," said Erma, in a piteous tone, "there was nothing improper in my staying with Mr. Gladden to comfort him in his age and affliction, was there?"

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"Improper!—Erma! Was it inhuman, unchristian in you to stay with him in his need? Those are the questions to ask yourself. Some demon has suggested this base thought. Now, who is it? You are no longer unshielded, my child. I am your father, and I am here. Tell me what low brute has criticised your conduct?"

"Never mind now, dearest father. Go on."

"I came from the Red Fox in a hired gig, expecting to find you here, the guest of Mr. Gladden."

"Oh! you did not know, then—you did not know—that he had gone to his heavenly home?" said Erma.

"No; how should I, child? I knew nothing about what had occurred here within the last few days until I was on my way from the Old Red Fox to Brighthome. Then I happened to ask the negro boy who had come along to drive me, and to take the gig back to the inn, how old Mr. Gladden's health was, and he answered me, after the manner of his kind: 'Gone to glory four days ago, sir, and the funeral was yesterday.'"

Erma burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

Little Rody slipped swiftly down from his grandfather's knee and clambered up to his mother's side, and laid his little face against hers, and began his formula of sympathy:

"My poor mamma! My poor mamma!"

Otho Herne said not a word; he knew the gust of grief must have its way and pass.

Erma recovered herself without help except from the child. She drew a deep breath, wiped the tears from her eyes, and said:

"I know—I know that he is not dead! I know—I know that he is alive—more alive than he ever was in this world, just as the bird on the wing through the sunny air is more alive than it was when in the shell. I know he is a higher, fuller, brighter, more perfect man than he ever was before; but, oh! oh! for all that, I cannot help but weep! I loved him so! Oh! father, I did love him so! I weep for myself, but not for him! I loved him so dearly! I would not have forsaken him in his age and weakness and affliction; no, indeed, not if the whole world had forsaken me for staying with him!"

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"Certainly not. You could never have been guilty of so base an act of ingratitude! But, Erma, why harp upon this subject? You are, every now and then, recurring painfully to this theme. Some one must have wounded you to the quick by suspicions or slander. Now who has done so? I am your father, and I have a right to know. I insist upon your telling me," said Otho Herne, taking his daughter's hand and gazing into her troubled face.

She could not bear that look; her self-control broke down before it.

"Oh, my dear father, yes! yes!" she breathed, in a dying voice. "Some one has slandered me, bitterly slandered me, to my husband!"

"Your husband, Erma? Have you lost your senses, child, or what is the matter with you? Do you know what you are saying?" inquired Otho Herne, uneasily.

"Oh, yes, my father, too well I know. I am speaking of my husband. He was not killed in the massacre by the Comanches, as everyone supposed; for just four days ago, on the very day on which Mr. Gladden died, my husband suddenly appeared before me, alive and well."

"'Alive and well!'" echoed Mr. Herne, in astonishment. "Your husband, Rodolph Wolfsohn?"

"My husband, Rodolph Wolfsohn, alive and well," reiterated Erma.

"How came there to be a false report of his death?"

"I do not know. I did not hear. He offered no sort of explanation of his sudden appearance. He came, gazed with anger on me and with hatred on his child; he reproached me with unfaithfulness, accused me of crime, and finally he threw me off and left me forever."

"The infern——" began Otho Herne; but before he could utter another word, the hand of Erma was over his mouth, and she was pleading:

"Hush! oh hush, dear father! Do not blame him! Circumstances were so much against me—so much! The secret that I kept from him so long, but which I was ready to tell him had he waited to hear it then, and—my misunderstood position here—all working upon a mind naturally jealous and suspicious, rendered even more so by education and experience, and roused to fury, yes, to madness, by the slanders with which some evil-disposed

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person had poisoned his mind. Oh, father, do not censure Rodolph Wolfsohn! I found him noble, tender, generous in the few weeks of married life I passed with him before he went to Mexico two years ago; believe me, I did. Do not censure him."

"And you love this man who has insulted and deserted you?" said Otho Herne, gravely and sternly.

"Oh, if I not loved him, with a love that governed my fate, would I have married him with the secret that I held? I loved him so fatally, my father, that I chose rather to risk misery with him than to live without him."

"And the misery has come," said Otho Herne, grimly.

"'And the misery has come,'" echoed Erma, in sorrowful assent. "Yet, dear father—yet, I do not regret that I married him. I am glad, in the midst of my trouble, that I am his wife—glad that, whatever happens, I shall still be his wife. For I love him! I love him! Oh, dear father! If he has left me in jealous fury, I know that he suffers even more than I do. For I know that he loves me! He loves me even as I love him. Oh, my father! Do not censure him. Do not despise me. But try to find him and disabuse his mind of all suspicion. You can do it. Only you. I am bedridden here, and can do nothing. If I were to appeal to anyone of my neighbors, telling them how my husband had appeared and vanished, and asking them to find him and bring him to me, they would simply believe me crazy. They still think of him as among the dead."

"What? Has no one seen him since he returned?"

"No one, it seems. He must be living somewhere in strict retirement, or else he must have left the neighborhood. Father, will you seek him out and try to find him?"

"Ah, Erma, where should I begin to look?"

"My Uncle Blantyre has returned by this time. His wife went to meet him this afternoon."

"What! has my brother-in-law, Blantyre, come back from the wars unscathed?" inquired Otho Herne.

"Unscathed, and with the rank of brevet brigadier-general. Oh, father! about my husband. Will you seek him out?"

"Erma, you must have been very much astonished at

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meeting with your Uncle Blantyre in this neighborhood—where he had not lived, I think, for the many years he held a commission in the navy," said Mr. Herne, ignoring her earnest appeal.

"Oh, I was indeed! I met him in the stagecoach in which I came down here. He got in at Winchester and traveled all the rest of the way with me in the same coach. I did not at once recognize him, for I had not seen him since I was a child five years before, and he did not recognize me at all. When I heard his name called by a fellow passenger, then I discovered who he was, and understood why it was that his features were rather familiar to me."

"Did you make yourself known to him?"

"Oh, no, no, no; I was in a dread lest he should find me out, especially when I heard that he was going down to Ice Cliff, near which was Brighthome, my own destination. I kept my veil down all the rest of the way, after hearing his name and neighborhood."

"But surely this mutual incognito could not have been kept up long, Erma?"

"Ah, it proved impossible! Soon after I reached Brighthome, I found that Capt. Blantyre was a frequent visitor at the house, and, indeed, a favored suitor of Mrs. Fleetwood, whom he subsequently married."

"Then you often met him?"

"Almost daily."

"How came about the mutual recognition at last?"

"Not very suddenly, but gradually. I used sometimes to catch him looking at me wistfully. It made me feel uneasy to have him do so. One day at dinner a lady visitor asked me suddenly if I came from New York, and if I knew anyone in that city of the name of Herne."

"What could have caused a perfect stranger to ask you such a question as that?" exclaimed Mr. Herne, with a look of annoyance.

"I do not know, dear father. But the shock was too much for my weakened nerves. The room swam round with me, and I lost consciousness."

"That was unfortunate. It must have excited suspicion."

"No. I was in the simplest and most unsuspicious

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circle of friends. I was in deep mourning for my dear mother, as you know. They took it for granted that I had lost a near and dear friend of the name of Herne, and I admitted that such was the truth. It passed off. But the next time I saw Capt. Blantyre it was in a room full of company—in fact, I never happened to see him alone—he lowered his voice, and said to me, 'Your face reminds me vividly of that of a little girl I once knew—Mary Herne.' I stopped him at once—for there were many observers in the room—and replied in a low tone, 'I know whom you mean. Meet me in the front hall, when the family has retired, and I will tell you something that you ought to know, and to keep to yourself.'"

"That was very imprudent, my dear Erma," said Otho Herne, seriously.

"I know it was, but 'desperate ills require desperate remedies.' I was in a desperate strait. I was in danger of his sudden recognition of me in public, at any moment. Besides, he was my own uncle. I thought, as the night was a terribly tempestuous one, with a snowstorm raging, that he would stay at Brighthome until morning. Hence my appointment with him. But he arose to leave at the usual hour—ten o'clock—and in taking leave of me, took the opportunity of saying, in a low tone: 'Front hall, twelve.'"

"What must he have thought of you, my poor Erma?"

"No evil, I believe. Oh, I was too deeply, deeply distressed to excite any feeling but compassion in any bosom, I think."

"You met him?"

"Yes, at twelve o'clock. When all the household were abed and asleep, I went downstairs and found him in the hall. He told me that he had not returned to Blantyre House, but had spent the last two hours in looking in at a negro Methodist love feast, held in the barn, and so had come back to keep his tryst with me. Then I told him that I was his niece, Mary Ermengarde Wildering Herne, the daughter of his sister, Mary Blantyre, afterward Mary Herne. I told him of the calamity that had ruined all our family, had cast you into the State prison, and had sent my mother broken hearted to the grave. He had not heard a word of this, which had happened

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while he was at sea cruising on the Indian Ocean. I told him that, by your advice, I had sought a home and a living far from New York, and in doing so had dropped both ends of my name and retained only the middle two, which were those of my grandmother, my father's mother, Ermengarde, or Erma Wildering."

"Blantyre, in his few and far-between visits to us, had always known you as Mary, and I doubt whether he ever knew that you had any other name in addition to that, except Herne."

"If he had ever known it, he had forgotten it. He was deeply grieved at the tragedy he then heard of for the first time from my lips, and he agreed with me that we must bury the whole history in oblivion. After that he went away and I returned to my room with a feeling of guilt and peril that I failed to shake off for several days."

"No wonder! No wonder!" sighed Otho Herne.

"From that time, however, Uncle Blantyre and myself understood each other, and met as friends who were but recent acquaintances. He married the young Widow Fleetwood about two months before I became the wife of Rodolph Wolfsohn, and in two months from the last-mentioned event Capt. Blantyre and Rodolph Wolfsohn raised a company of volunteers and went to Mexico. Capt. Blantyre is returning with the rank of brevet brigadier-general. Rodolph Wolfsohn was reported killed, but, as I have already told you, he returned suddenly four days since, when, frenzied by slanders against me that seemed to be justified by false appearances, he rushed off again! Oh! Oh, my dear father, will you seek him out?" she pleaded, with her hands clasped and her eyes raised to his, as in prayer.

"I will, Erma; and if he can be found, I will bring him a penitent to your presence."

"Oh, bring him, but not as a penitent, for he has nothing to be penitent for! Others have wronged him most by slandering me."

"Well, well, I'll bring him. Now, Erma, tell me, dear, after that allusion to my unlucky name by the lady at the dinner table, did anything else occur in connection with the tragedy to distress you?"

"Oh, dear father, I received a succession of shocks that

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seemed a fatality. On my very wedding morning I received a box containing a bridal gift to me. Do you remember Judah Stukely?"

"Your mad suitor? Surely I do!"

"Father, he renewed his suit after the trial. When I would have repelled him, he pursued me, and threatened to follow me to the uttermost parts of the earth and denounce me as—as—as——"

"The daughter of a felon! Diabolical poltroon that he was!"

"That was one reason why I dropped both ends of my name of Mary Erma Wildering Herne, and called myself Erma Wildering. I was in constant fear of his appearance and denunciations. If any stranger inquired for me I shook with fear. When that lady at the dinner table mentioned the name of Herne I took her to be a tool in the hands of Stukely, until I learned from Mrs. Fleetwood that she had seen the name on a forgotten little collar of mine. I was always dreading him."

"The infamous coward!"

"Well, father, on the morning of my marriage day I received the box I told you of. I had it opened in my presence, then sent off the servant, and knelt down to unpack the treasures myself. I took out the paper, the cotton wool and the linen, and then beheld—oh, no, no, no! I cannot tell you what I saw," murmured Erma, growing deadly pale, and seeming about to swoon.

Mr. Herne, surprised and alarmed at her agitation, went and brought a glass of water from a little side stand that stood against the wall, and offered it to her.

She shook her head and waved it off.

He took it back and put it down, then returned to her bedside, and inquired:

"What did you behold, Erma?"

She did not reply, so he repeated his question.

"I saw—that which—nearly killed me where I stood—with horror and remorse——" she answered, with a slow and choking voice, as she covered her face with both hands.

There was an ominous silence for a few moments, and then:

"'Horror and remorse!'" echoed Mr. Herne, in a low

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voice, full of consternation. "What can you ever have done, my youthful and blameless daughter, to subject you to a visitation of horror and remorse? What was in that box?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you! Father, I cannot tell you! I may some time. Not now! Oh, not now! Let us pass to something else!" exclaimed Erma, quickly, excitedly, as if she were hurrying to get rid of the subject. "You asked me—I was telling you of the succession of shocks I had received. The name at the dinner was one; the box on my wedding morning was another; the third, on my arrival at my husband's house, was the sight of the photograph of Gustave Perlemonte, with the discovery that he was my husband's stepfather. Nothing but the strong love that filled my soul sustained me in that hour of trial. It was not the last. A few days later, at the very first dinner party to which we had been invited, I found myself suddenly confronted with my old school mistress, Sophy Somers, who would have unconsciously betrayed me in the very words of her greeting; but, fortunately, we met first without witnesses. She happened to be alone in the drawing room when I entered it. I was no more surprised at meeting her than she was at meeting me. We had an explanation. Then she promised to observe my secret and be cautious. Thus, you see, two persons of this neighborhood besides myself were acquainted with my antecedents—my Uncle Blantyre, and my old governess, Mrs. Somers."

"The whole world may know them now, my child. The unjust and cruel reproach has passed away. We are vindicated. Now, my dear, where shall I go to seek Wolfsohn?"

"Ah! I know not! Darkwood, his old home, is the nearest place. You might hear of him there; if not there, then perhaps at Miss Barbra Gunn's, at The Marsh across the bridge; failing in these two places, you could make inquiries at the Red Fox and at Ice Cliff. And, oh, my father! bring him back!"

"I will, I will, Erma. I sent the gig in which I came back to the inn. Shall I ring and order a horse to carry me? But, by the way, Erma, have we any right to order anything here? Are you not staying only on sufferance,

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until you recover from your injuries?" he suddenly inquired.

"My dearest father, I am here as mistress of Brighthome for the term of my natural life, after which the estate is settled on my son."

"Eh!"

Erma repeated her intelligence.

"So Mr. Gladden left you and your boy all his property?"

"With the exception of a few legacies, and with some restrictions, yes; for he had no blood relations on the face of the earth."

Mr. Herne looked somewhat thoughtful. "I had almost rather he had not done it! It will complicate matters," he said to himself.

"Dear father, will you now ring and order your horse! Oh! I am so anxious for you to go and bring Rodolph to me. And then you will stay with us, father. We will never be parted more," said Erma, earnestly.

"Child, we will talk of our future plans when we have drawn your husband into the consultation," said Mr. Herne, as he arose and rang the bell.

In a few moments the summons was answered by Aquilo.

"Saddle George, and bring him around to the door for this gentleman, and henceforth take your orders from him," said Erma.

The servant bowed and left the room to obey these directions.

Twenty minutes later Mr. Herne had mounted the easy-pacing white cob "George," and was away on his doubtful quest.

CHAPTER XIX.

GONE IN RAGE.

Oh, God! how bitter are the wrongs of love!
Life has no other sorrow so acute:
For love is made of every fine emotion,
Of generous impulses and noble thoughts;
It looks up to the stars and dreams of heaven,
It nestles 'mid the flowers and sweetens earth.
Love is aspiring, yet humble too;

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It doth exalt another o'er itself
With sweet heart-homage, which delights to raise
That which it worships, yet is fain to win
The idol of its lone and lowly home
Of deep affection. 'Tis an utter wreck
When such hopes perish. From that moment, life
Has in its depths a well of bitterness
For which there is no healing. —L. E. LANDON.

At the same hour in which the interview between Otho Herne and his daughter, Erma, took place in her bedchamber in Brighthome, as has been related in the last chapter, Gustave Perlemonte and his stepson, Rodolph, sat at either side of the little, round, center table, before the fire, in the old parlor at Darkwood.

Perlemonte leaned back in his chair on the right, smok-

the fire, in the old parlor at Darkwood.

Wolfsohn stooped forward, with his elbow on the table and his head bent upon his open hand.

He had been ill and confined to his bed at Darkwood during the last four days.

Perlemonte, who was possessed of some skill in medical science among his other accomplishments, attended him; and the servants, all new to the place and strangers to Wolfsohn, waited on him, without suspecting his identity. They reported that a strange man had been taken ill at their master's house, and they thought his name was Wilson, or some such. This excited neither surprise nor curiosity in a neighborhood where tramps and travelers were equally received and hospitably cared for, either in the negroes' "quarters" or the master's house, according to their social status.

It was the secret policy of the villainous Perlemonte, as well as the expressed wish of the spirit-broken Wolfsohn, that the presence of the latter in the neighborhood should not be known.

Rodolph had returned, four days previous, from his fatal interview with Erma, in a state of wild excitement, that soon rose to high fever and delirium which imperiled his own life and obliged those about him to use force in restraining him and keeping him in his bed, until the powerful sedatives administered by Perlemonte had time to act upon him.

Four days of this treatment by strong sedatives, with-

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out regard to their after effect upon the health of the unhappy man, had reduced the violent raging of anguish in Rodolph's heart and brain to a state of lethargic despair, in which he became totally indifferent to his own life and fate, almost incapable of spontaneous action and easily led or directed by those about him, especially by Perlemonte.

This was the first day of his reappearance below stairs.

He sat now, bending forward, with his elbow resting on the table, his pale forehead bowed upon his open palm, and his long fingers straying in the meshes of his dark, disheveled hair.

Gustave Perlemonte sat leaning back in his armchair opposite, leisurely smoking, while he contemplated his companion.

Not one word had Rodolph yet spoken in relation to his visit to Brighthome, or that violent interview of which Perlemonte was so anxious to hear the particulars.

It was Perlemonte who broke the silence.

"Now, Rodolph, my dear boy," he said, apropos to nothing, "I am quite ready to come forward and confess that my early life was not exactly what it ought to have been. You know that, of course."

Wolfsohn nodded apathetically.

"I was a wild young blade when I married the pretty widow, your mother, and became your stepfather, and—more's the pity—in my thoughtless extravagance, squandered a good part of her fortune."

Again his companion nodded mechanically.

"But that was long ago, my dear fellow—long ago; when I was a young man and you were a child. A good while since, was it not?"

Wolfsohn bent his head in careless assent.

"But even then, Rodolph, with all my faults—and I acknowledge that they were legion—I was never unkind to my little stepson, as it is too often the nature of stepfathers to be. Now was I, my dear fellow?"

Wolfsohn shook his head slightly.

"No; I was very fond of you. I squandered your inheritance, but I was very fond of you. Why not? I squandered my own patrimony, though I was very fond

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of myself. Very reprehensible in both cases, but not inconsistent in either, was it?"

Rodolph shook his head.

"And further, my dear boy, with all the vices of my youth and temperament, I was never guilty of a really dishonorable act. I was never suspected or accused of any such thing, except by that lunatic, Herne, whom I would have slain for his insult to my honor, if he had not, with his superior and gigantic strength, pitched me overboard. You never knew me to be charged with any really dishonorable act, did you?"

Rodolph shook his head.

"No! nothing can be charged against me but a gay and rollicking youth, in which I sowed a good crop—an evil crop, rather, of wild oats, long ago reaped in sorrow and repented of. One fruit of my repentance toward you, Rodolph, has been my watchfulness over your interests here since my return. Ah! they were the interests of a man I supposed to be dead, but who still had left an honored name to be guarded against dishonor. It was therefore that I sought to shelter your wife—your supposed widow."

"Do not name her!" groaned Rodolph, with the first signs of waking from his half somnambulent state that he had shown during this interview.

"In justice to myself, I must name her, my dear boy. I must ask you whether your own observation, during your visit to Brighthome, did not corroborate all that I had told you?"

"It did! It did!" answered the wretched man, in a broken voice.

"I knew it would. And, Rodolph, if you have a shadow of doubt on your mind as to that woman's utter worthlessness, inquire here in this neighborhood, among the neighbors, who have all abandoned her; afterward, if you could convince yourself of her infamous antecedents, take her photograph to New York, show it at headquarters, and ask after the original, and you will hear of a young outcast—young in years, but old in crime—most beautiful in person, but monstrous in depravity. You will hear——"

"For Heaven's sake, hush! Do you suppose I can go

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up and down the world inquiring into my own dishonor? Pah! I saw enough at Brighthome! I saw enough! Did I not see his child upon her knee?" groaned the young man, while a look of anguish wrung the face that had been so apathetic in its despair but a moment before.

"I wonder you had not slain both upon the spot!" exclaimed Perlemonte. "Yet, I am glad that you did not," he added, hypocritically.

"I would not have hurt a hair of either—not of the guilty woman, much less of the innocent child! What crime had that baby committed?" said Rodolph, with a strange, instinctive tenderness for his poor, disowned child, and without the slightest suspicion that his wife had fallen when he threw her off, and seriously injured herself.

"Did you feel in an equally forbearing temper toward the destroyer of your peace?"

"No. I went forth from the presence of the woman to seek and kill the man. I knew where to look for him at that hour. I found him in his study. But the avenger had been there before me. I found the hoary-headed hypocrite dead in his chair!"

"You were the first to find him, then?"

"Yes. It—the discovery—at such a moment—when I had come with murder in my heart—quieted me for an instant. Then I rang the bell to summon aid, and hurried out of the house before that summons could be answered. No one saw me, nor do I know how I got here."

"You got here raving mad, and on the brink of a brain fever. It took myself and three able-bodied negro men to get you to bed and hold you there, to keep you from dashing yourself to pieces until the medicine I administered had time to take effect on your nerves and quiet you. My men complimented you with the suspicion of *mania-a-potu,* or, as they call it, mad drunk. I did not contradict them. I could not, without explaining, and, of course, I could not explain. That was how you got here, Rodolph. You are quieter now."

"Yes," breathed the unhappy young man.

"And now that you are calm enough to think, you will understand, I hope, that even old Gladden was more sinned against than sinning," said Perlemonte, deceitfully.

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"Like myself, he was the victim of a woman of irresistible beauty and unscrupulous wickedness," muttered Rodolph to himself.

"'Of irresistible beauty?' Yes, and of irresistible fascinations! Of the great influence and power that she had over him a signal proof has been found to-day in the reading of his will. He has passed over all his own near kindred and old friends, and left the whole of his vast real and personal estate to her for the term of her natural life, and to her child after her. Proof, also, if proof were wanted, of the nature of their mutual relations."

"Don't! don't!" breathed Wolfsohn, in a suffocating voice.

"Now, my dear boy, what are you going to do? Of course, there is one thing you are bound to do—to divorce this woman."

"No! I hate the very word 'divorce,' full as it is of disloyalty, dishonor! Nor could I drag my domestic miseries before the tribunal of an open court and public press! Nor do I believe in the dissolubility of marriage. Marriage is indissoluble except by death. The woman is now my wife. Evil as she is, my wife she must remain until death. But I will never see her more. I leave this neighborhood to-day. Yes, within this hour. Is my horse in your stables, father Perlemonte? But, of course, I suppose he is, and in good condition to travel. Will you order him?"

"But this is very sudden, Rodolph," said Gustave Perlemonte, with a false show of dissuasion; for, in truth, he himself felt anxious that his stepson should leave the neighborhood, lest some accident should open his eyes to see how utterly false and calumnious had been all the tales he had told of Erma, and how easily they could, every one of them, be refuted.

"When I came here," said Rodolph, in answer to Perlemonte's pretended dissuasion, "I did not intend to stay one hour. I have stayed four days. I must go now! Oh, don't you see that I cannot breathe in this atmosphere!"

"But you are not able to travel."

"Then I will stop at the nearest roadside inn, farmhouse or cottage where my strength gives out."

"But where will you go, my boy?"

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"Away! That is all I know! I will go away."

Perlemonte still affected to dissuade him from his purpose, but he saw that Wolfsohn was firm in his intention.

The horse was ordered, and luncheon was ordered. And while Rodolph went up to his room and packed his small valise, the table was set in the dining room, and the horse saddled and brought around to the front door.

When Rodolph came down, equipped for his ride, pale, feeble, but resolved, he found Perlemonte waiting for him at the foot of the stairs.

"Come into the dining room and have a cold cut of beef and a nip of brandy before you go. Now, indeed, you must, or you will drop from your saddle through exhaustion!" persisted Perlemonte.

Rodolph, thus urged, allowed his stepfather to take his arm and lead him to the table, where he forced himself to swallow a few morsels of food and a little wine.

Then, taking leave of Mr. Perlemonte, he mounted his horse and set out, with no definite plan as to the direction of his journey.

Perlemonte returned to his chair and his cigar before the fire in the parlor.

Lighting a fresh weed, and lolling back in his chair, he puffed away between his soliloquy and his laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha! Well, he is gone, safe enough, now! How false appearances may be made to mislead a man! He is persuaded of that young woman's worthlessness, not so much from my testimony as from the witness of his own eyes. He will never come back to this neighborhood. And Madame Scornful may fall into my hands at last! And now, who in the demon's name is this coming to disturb my peace?" he exclaimed, testily, as he heard the sound of horse's feet coming rapidly up to the front door, and turning his head, saw, through the front window, a stranger in the act of dismounting at the horse block.

He arose and listened. He heard the stranger knock and the man servant open the door. He then left the parlor and passed into the front hall in time to hear the following colloquy:

"Is there a gentleman of the name of Mr. Rodolph Wolfsohn stopping here?"

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"No, sar."

"Has there been a gentleman of that name stopping here?"

"No, sar! Dere's been a sick man name Wilson stayin' here, but he's got well enough to go home now, an' he's gone," the negro explained, in perfect good faith, for his ears had at first deceived him in the sound of the guest's name, and he had never been set right.

"Do you know anything of the present whereabouts of Mr. Rodolph Wolfsohn?"

"No, sar; don't know nuffin' 'bout no sich gemman."

"Paul!" cried his master, from the threshold of the parlor door, "show that gentleman in here, if he has any more questions to ask."

And he retreated into the parlor, to wait for the visitor, who soon came, ushered in by Paul, who closed the door and left the two men alone together.

Mr. Perlemonte turned around and confronted the newcomer. Then he burst into a loud, harsh laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! Oh-h-h! Is it you? Why, I thought the hangman had got you long ago!"

"Scoffer! It ill becomes you, who were providentially rescued from sudden and violent death, as it would me, who was saved at the same moment from crime and a life-long remorse, to jest on such a solemn subject. I came here, Mr. Perlemonte, to inquire after your stepson, Rodolph Wolfsohn, my daughter Erma's husband. Can you tell me anything respecting his whereabouts?"

"Whose whereabouts?" inquired Perlemonte, gathering his eyebrows with a look of perplexity.

"Rodolph Wolfsohn's."

"Rodolph Wolfsohn's? Oh, see here, come now, you know! You must have been comfortably hanged and sent to Hades, after all. You are asking after a man you have lately met in the nether world. Rodolph Wolfoshn has been there these two years or more. Sent thither in a great hurry by the Comanches, you must understand, in the massacre of September '46. Anybody in this neighborhood could have told you that. But what am I talking of? This is the upper world. You and Wolfsohn belong to the nether one. Go back to Hades, poor, wan-

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dering ghost, and look for your kindred spirit there," said Perlemonte.

"Pray cease these untimely jests, and tell me if you know anything of Wolfsohn?" inquired Mr. Herne, with gravity and with great forbearance.

"I know nothing on earth of Rodolph except that he was killed by the Comanches, two years since," answered Perlemonte, seriously, at last.

"He was not killed. It was a false report. He has returned alive. He came to see his wife, four days ago, and left her suddenly, since which he has not been seen."

"Eh! What?"

"I say he came to see Erma, his wife, four days ago, and left the house suddenly, since which time he has not been seen or heard of."

"Who saw him besides his wife, when he came back?"

"No one."

"Oh! then you may depend the lady fell asleep and dreamed of this visit!"

"I wish you would not jest, Mr. Perlemonte. I really see nothing to jest about."

"By my life, I do not jest. Rodolph Wolfsohn was made food for crows two years past. Everybody knows that. And here is his widow, who is still wearing deep mourning for him, saying that he came and went all of a sudden! No one except herself saw or heard him, then—no one has seen or heard of him since. What must be the inference? Why, that lady either lied or dreamed. She could not have lied, therefore she must have dreamed," said Perlemonte, seriously enough now.

"Stay—I told you that no one but my daughter had seen Mr. Wolfsohn. I made a mistake. I had forgotten. Old Jugurtha, who admitted him, saw and spoke with him, but, unfortunately, believing his master to be dead, took him for a ghost."

"Oh! old Jugurtha saw him also, did he? This mixes matters. Took him for a ghost, you say? Very natural and proper. A ghost he must have been! But, at any rate, Mr. Herne, laying all jokes aside, and speaking in the gravest earnestness, I tell you that, ghost or no ghost, dream or no dream, whatever your daughter's visitor was, it was not Rodolph Wolfsohn in the flesh!"

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"And I know it was! Why on earth should you say it was not?"

"Why, man alive, because Wolfsohn has been dead and buried—or eaten up by the vultures—years ago! If he could, by any possibility, have returned here four days ago, would he not have been seen or heard of by some one or other? Where has he lodged or boarded, if he has returned? Where has he slept and eaten? Who has seen or served him? Nonsense, man; your daughter dreamed!"

"And old Jugurtha?" inquired Herne.

"Lied, probably, to help out his mistress' dream."

"If I do not hear more of him in this neighborhood soon, I shall be very apt to come round to your opinion," thought Herne; but he did not say it.

He arose and took leave of Gustave Perlemonte, saying, as he did so:

"I wish you could feel as thankful as I do that the nearly fatal encounter between us that night on the steamboat deck did not end in the death and ruin of both. Mr. Perlemonte, I speak the truth when I tell you that the news of your rescue and continued life gave me more joy than a verdict of acquittal could have given me in the most hopeless hours of my trial."

"Well—well—well," said the other, slowly and half reluctantly, though he was somewhat impressed by the earnestness of the speaker, "I, too, am glad that I was not drowned, nor you hanged, nor both of us doomed to eternal perdition for our bad tempers. There, man, go and look after your daughter's health and see that she does not indulge in such vivid dreams, or if she does, let them be of living lovers, not dead husbands."

Otho Herne left the house, remounted his horse and rode away toward The Marsh. He crossed the foot and bridle path over the railway bridge and rode on up the road eastward until he came to the lane leading to the house. He rode into the yard, where he found the old lady herself, just returned from some inspection of her fields or orchards, cap borders flaring, cap strings flying, and face flushing in the wind as she stood soundly berating a group of her colored people, and threatening them

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with all sorts of penalties, the very lightest of which was to be "sold to Georgia," unless they mended their ways.

So engaged was she in her lecture that she did not observe the approach of a stranger until he alighted from his horse and stood before her, hat in hand.

"Who in the dee are you, and what in thunder do you want?" she sharply demanded, not being very well pleased to be caught with her dress and her temper both in dishabille.

"My name is Herne, madam, at your service."

"Well, I have got no use for you."

"And I came to inquire after a gentleman——"

"There are no gentlemen here. I don't believe in them. This is a lady's house."

Otho Herne bowed low and continued:

"Of the name of Wolfsohn—Rodolph Wolfsohn, once of this neighborhood. Can you tell me where he is at present?"

"Man, are you drunk or crazy? Rody Wolfsohn was massacred and scalped by the Indians several years ago! —Jehial! mind what you are about there! Keep your eyes to yourself!"

"Then you have not seen Mr. Wolfsohn very lately?" inquired Otho Herne.

Miss Gunn eyed him slowly and contemptuously from head to foot, and then answered:

"Have you ever heard me accused of weakness in intellect? Of believing in ghosts, or seeing them, or the like? No, I have not seen Rody Wolfsohn's spirit since he was killed by the Indians, and eaten by the wolves! But come in the house, man, and rest yourself, and have a cool drink of cider. It will cool you down and clear your head. I don't know who you are, but you want looking after, that is certain. Come in the house, and maybe you'll stay to dinner. We have dinner at one o'clock here. I do despise these new-fangled hours. Come."

Miss Gunn turned to go into the old house, but the stranger excused himself, saying that he was in a hurry.

"Fiddlestick! The dinner is ready to go on the table! Jehial! Did you hear me ask this man to stay to dinner? What do you mean, you lazy, black hippopotamus?

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Why don't you take his horse and lead him around to the stable? If you don't take his horse this minute, I'll——"

Her words were cut short by the prompt action of the negro, who jumped at the stranger, snatched the bridle from his hand, and would have led the animal off, "whether or no," had not Otho Herne instantly followed and recovered his bridle and remounted his horse.

He thanked Miss Gunn for offered hospitality, but again excused himself on the ground of a great pressure of business, and rode off, leaving the lady standing there, swearing like a moss-trooper over her disappointment, for Miss Barbra dearly loved the entertainment of a guest at dinner.

From The Marsh, Otho Herne rode on to The Dale.

Avoiding the family dwelling house, he pushed his inquiries among the negroes in the fields, or at their quarters, but without the slightest success.

Next he rode up to The Hill, and "interviewed" some of Gen. Bibb's people, but with no satisfactory result.

He went down to the river, recrossed the railroad bridge, and rode on to Blantyre House. Here he learned that Mrs. Blantyre had gone on to the Red Fox to meet Capt. Blantyre, but he could learn nothing of Rodolph Wolfsohn. He continued on to Ice Cliff, and went to the little hotel to have his horse fed and rested while he himself took dinner, after which he spent an hour making cautious but fruitless inquiries about Wolfsohn.

In the afternoon he pushed his investigations out as far as the Red Fox. Here he heard the latest interesting news—how Capt. Blantyre had arrived that day, had been met by his wife in her carriage, and they had set out for Blantyre House together; but he heard nothing of the object of his search.

Finally he turned his horse's head homeward, and he arrived at Brighthome late that evening.

He went immediately to his daughter's chamber, where he found her anxiously awaiting his return.

She had a little table by her bedside laid ready for his supper.

"What news, dear father?" she eagerly inquired as he entered the room.

"Ah! my child, none! Rodolph is not in this neigh-

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borhood. I have scoured the country for thirty miles around without finding any clew to him. No one has seen or heard of him. Indeed, my dear Erma, wherever I inquired for him I fear I was mistaken for an escaped lunatic. He is certainly not in these regions."

"Then I am indeed forsaken!" moaned Erma.

"My dear, it appears that no one has seen him but yourself, to whom he appeared and disappeared so suddenly, that—I am sometimes half inclined to think the whole occurrence only a very vivid dream of yours."

"A dream! Oh, father, impossible! A dream, in broad daylight, directly after our early breakfast, while I sat playing with my child in my arms? Impossible, my dear father! Besides, Jugurtha saw him and took him for a ghost, and——"

"Did Jugurtha pretend to see him only after you had seen him?"

"No, father, before; at the same time, and after, he spoke of having seen the 'ghost' of Mr. Wolfsohn. No, father; I see what you mean, but Jugurtha did not take his cue from me. I never spoke of my husband's visit until I spoke of it to you."

"Then, if he has been here, he has gone for the present," said Mr. Herne, thoughtfully.

"And I am deserted!" said Erma to herself, in the depths of her despairing heart.

"Erma, my child, let me advise you to preserve the silence that you have hitherto observed toward your neighbors in regard to your husband's visit, real or imaginary," said Mr. Herne.

"Oh, yes, until I can hear from him. Ah! my dear father, that visit was not the subject of so much joy and gratulation that I should speak of it to anyone. Dear father, you have had a very fatiguing day. Your room is ready for you, and Aquilo is there ready to wait on you. Is it not strange that not one of them recognizes you as the sometime overseer, James Aleyn?"

"I think not, my dear. The disguise that changed a blond old gentleman into a brunette young man was too perfect. The padded chest and shoulder braces that gave erect carriage to a stooping frame, the black wig and full black beard that covered the scant hair and smooth chin,

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and the belladonna that enlarged and darkened the light blue eyes, these were disguises that your simple people could never have seen through. Where is my room, Erma?"

"Just opposite across the hall, father. When you have refreshed yourself with a wash and a change of clothes, come back here and take your supper by my side. Will you, father? I hate to lose sight of you for a moment. And—it is very foolish," she added, with a smile, "but I like to see you eat."

"I will come back, Erma," replied Mr. Herne, as he left the room.

Fifteen minutes later he kept his word, and found a tempting repast waiting him.

When he had partaken freely of this, and had sent it away, he still continued to sit by his daughter's side, and hold her hand, and talk to her, until the striking of the clock warned him that the hour was late, and that it was time he should leave her to repose.

CHAPTER XX.

UNDYING LOVE.

It will live. No eye may see it.
In her soul it will lie deep.
Hidden from all; yet she shall feel it
Often stirring in its sleep.
So remember that the friendship
Which you now think poor and vain,
Will endure in hope and patience
Till you ask for it again.

Perhaps in some long twilight hour,
Like those you have known of old,
When past shadows gather round you,
And your other friends grow cold,
You may stretch your hands out toward her.
Ah, you will! She knows not when—
But she'll nurse her love and keep it
Faithfully for you till then.

—ADELAIDE ANNE PROCTER.

Early the next morning Erma pulled the tassel of the bell cord that was laid within her reach on the bolster.

Old Minty answered the summons.

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"Lay Mr. Herne's breakfast in the little breakfast room. See that the fire burns clearly and that everything is ready and comfortable by the time he comes down. He must not continue to take his meals by the bedside of an invalid. It was all very well the first day of his arrival, after so long a separation, but it must not be continued," said Mrs. Wolfsohn.

"Yes, mist'ess. Will I 'tend to all dese fings downstairs myse'f, mist'ess, or will I gib your order to Aunt Winny Wicket an' Uncle Jug, an' den come back an' wait on you, as I allers does?" respectfully inquired Minty.

"Give my orders to them and return to me."

"Yes, mist'ess."

"And, Minty!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Send Aquilo up to wait on Mr. Herne."

"Which I hab done so, mist'ess, an' he hab already took up de hot water."

"Very well, then, go and do as I told you, Minty."

"Yes, mist'ess."

And the good old creature withdrew to obey her instructions.

An hour later, when Mr. Herne had had his breakfast and Erma hers, and her invalid toilet had been made for the day and her room set in order, the father came again to the bedside of his daughter for a talk.

"About this will of Clement Gladden's, my dear," said Otho Herne, after the usual morning salutations, and mutual inquiries concerning health had been made and answered.

"Yes, I am sole executrix and should attend to its duties now, but am disabled, as you see. They shall be my first care after I am well. The servants are all left free. I have really no right at present to give them any orders, though they stay with me and serve me for love and from habit. Of course, they shall not lose anything by their devotion."

"Of coursé not," said Otho Herne.

"I feel certain also that they will want to remain with me on hire."

"If you stay here; but, my dear Erma, I hope you will not."

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"Why, father, what else could I do? Where should I go?"

"Let this place out to a good tenant, or leave it in the hands of a trusty overseer, and take your child and come with me."

"Father, I would like to stay here and wait for Rodolph. Perhaps——"

"What, Erma, wait here in this house for Wolfsohn?" exclaimed Otho Herne, with so much astonishment that Erma, in amazement, muttered:

"Why not?"

"There are several reasons 'why not.' First, because his finding you and your child in this house inflamed all his jealous fury against you. Secondly, Erma, because he has insulted, outraged and abandoned you. And though he is your husband—ay! though he possessed a husband's rights, multiplied a thousand fold, he has forfeited them all. You must not wait for him here, or seek him anywhere. Let him come to his senses and seek you in repentance, and atone to you, if he can, for his bitter injustice."

"Father," said Erma, weeping, "he has been maddened by slanderous tongues and false appearances. I know he suffers more than I do."

"I hope to Heaven he does! He deserves to suffer! I hope his sufferings may restore his reason."

"Oh, father, I would give my life to see him and convince him of my innocence—for his sake even more than for my own."

"You could not do it, Erma. And you shall not try. You shall not crawl, spaniel-like, to the feet of this man who has spurned you, and sue for a hearing, only to be spurned again. No, my child. By such condescension, such humiliation, you would not convince him of your innocence; you would only confirm him in his jealousy, and you would earn his contempt."

"Oh, father, father, do you think so?"

"I know so!"

"Ah, then, what is left for me to do?"

"Put this place in other hands and come with me."

"Where, father; where?"

"Anywhere out of this neighborhood, where you have

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suffered so much. Erma, there was one thing of which I did not inform you yesterday, because other and even more interesting topics were discussed."

"What was it, father?"

"That a large fortune has fallen to me—an estate in Yorkshire, England, to which it appears that I am heir-at-law. The New York attorneys who are in communication with the legal firm in the city of York, who have the estate in charge, have authorized me to draw on them for any funds that I may require to settle my affairs in this country, before going to England to take possession of my inheritance."

"And are you going, father?"

"Yes, just as soon as you are able to travel and before the winter sets in, for I intend to take my daughter and grandson with me, Erma."

"Oh, father, then we must leave word with all the neighbors that we have gone to Yorkshire, England, so that if Rodolph should return and discover his mistake, he may write to me. We must leave an exact address."

"You must leave all these details to your father, Erma, who is much more capable of managing them than yourself. I will also look out for a tenant, or an overseer to take charge of this place. You have nothing to do, my dear, but just to get well."

"Father," said Erma, after an interval of silence, "your appearance in this neighborhood will be the occasion of a great sensation. No one here knows of your relationship to me except Uncle Blantyre. You hate sensations and nine-day wonders, even more than I do. Advise with me, dear father, how we may moderate these matters."

"I have thought of all that. Now, Erma, I suppose, like all other persons, you have an inner circle of friends, who know your character well, who love and esteem you, and whom you, on your own side, esteem and love?"

"Yes, dear father, and they are easily counted up—Miss Barbra Gunn, the Bibbs, the Morsets, the Blantyres, Dr. Cleveland, our rector, and Dr. Dutton, our physician—and oh! I had nearly forgotten—Cousin Wally Lambe and his wife. These are absolutely all."

"And outside of these there is a wider and a thinner

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circle of church and business acquaintances who know you slightly, and for whom you care but little?"

"Yes."

"Well, with these latter we can have nothing to do. They will be sure to make mistakes, no matter how clearly the circumstances should be explained to them. But with your inner and closer circle of friends we must have a perfect understanding. We owe it to them."

"But how can this be brought about, without unpleasant scenes?"

"My dear child, we must put it all in the hands of my brother-in-law, Blantyre. He must go around and call on every family of your visiting circle, and announce my arrival and explain the circumstances."

"And they will all understand them and respond by calling on you, very promptly, father, I am sure."

"I will go and see Blantyre this morning."

"No, no! You had such a hard day yesterday, and it is such a long ride to Blantyre House. I will send Aquilo on horseback," said Erma.

The little amicable dispute was ended by a light rap at the door, followed by the entrance of Aquilo, who announced:

"Marse Cappen-Genal Blantyre's downstairs, to 'quire arter de healph ob mist'ess."

"Bring him up! Bring him up!" said Otho Herne. "He is the very man we are dying to see."

Aquilo stared, ducked down his head by way of a bow, and left the room.

A few moments later, Capt. Blanytre was admitted by Aquilo, who closed the door after the visitor and retired.

Otho Herne arose to receive him.

Blantyre started, stared and stood stock-still.

"Why, Blantyre! Brother-in-law Blantyre, don't you know me?" exclaimed the elder man.

"Herne! Otho Herne! I heard of your vindication even out in Mexico. It was in all the papers; but I could not hear of you. Where in the deuce have you been all this time, and where did you come from last?" demanded Blantyre, holding both Herne's hands and staring into his face with as much astonishment as delight.

"From a whaling cruise in the Arctic seas, man. The

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story is too long to tell twice in one week. I told it to Erma yesterday. Come and speak to her. See! she is holding out her arms to you!"

"My poor, poor girl!" said the captain, advancing toward Erma's bedside. "What did you mean by slipping on the waxed floor and spraining your ankle just now when your loving uncle was coming home from the wars,

"'Bound with victorious wreaths,'

and so forth, and so forth! What do you mean by it, Erma?"

"I mean to give you as warm a welcome from my invalid bed as I could give you on the threshold of my hall door, dear, dear Uncle Blantyre! Welcome! welcome!" she said, putting her arms around his neck and drawing down his face to hers.

"My poor girl! I am so sorry to find you laid up!" he said, in heartfelt sympathy.

"Oh, this is a light veil, scarcely to be thought of beside other griefs—yes, and joys. Think of the happiness to me of having my dear father here," said Erma.

"True," assented Capt. Blantyre.

"And this very happiness embarrasses her," observed Otho Herne.

"How, pray?"

"Sit down and I will tell you."

Both gentlemen seated themselves near Erma's bedside, and Otho Herne commenced:

"She was known here before her marriage as Erma Wildering—her baptismal name was Marie Ermengarde Wildering Herne. After our time of trial, when she removed to a new neighborhood, by the advice of friends, she dropped the first and last parts of her name, and called herself by her two middle ones alone. You know it would have been the cause of endless embarrassment to her to have been known by a name so unhappily notorious as Herne."

"Yes, of course."

"Therefore was it dropped, and the name of Erma Wildering alone retained. Now, as she was here before here marriage as Erma Wildering, it will strike everyone

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with surprise and distrust to hear that the vindicated homicide, Otho Herne, has appeared in this neighborhood, in the character of her father, unless there is an explanation."

"My dear Herne, tranquilize yourself. There are fewer secrets in this world than you would imagine. My good wife Susan, in telling me the news of the neighborhood, related the episode of Erma's gentlemanly overseer, James Aleyn, who turned out to be that great fugitive from justice, Otho Herne, whom all the neighborhood secretly but firmly believed to be the brother, or at least the half brother, of Mrs. Wolfsohn, and the object of all that secret sorrow which had been such a mystery to her friends."

"My neighbors believed this?" exclaimed Erma.

"Yes, my dear; but I never should have troubled you with the story had not the happy arrival of your father taken all the trouble out of it."

"And they really all this time believed him to be my brother?" repeated Erma, still in astonishment.

"So much for my successful make-up as a young man," said Mr. Herne.

"And so, you see, it will be a very little accession of surprise to let them know he is your father. They know already—as all the world knows—that Otho Herne is honorably vindicated. I will take this matter in hand, Herne, and set you and Erma right with your neighbors."

"Thanks, Blantyre; you are the very man to do it."

"Father," whispered Erma, "I did say that I would never mention to anyone the cruel visit of my husband, but I would like to tell Uncle Blantyre, under the seal of secrecy."

"Tell him, then, my dear; but I would not like to have that affair talked over, even among our nearest friends," said Otho Herne.

And while Capt. Blantyre watched and wondered what it was all about, Erma commenced and told him of the visit of her husband, softening as much as possible in the telling all that was harsh and cruel in his conduct, and enlarging upon the false appearances that had driven him to frenzy.

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Capt. Blantyre heard her in perfect silence. When Erma had ceased to speak, he said:

"This is nothing new to me, either. I am not surprised, however much I may be grieved. I heard as long as six months ago that Rodolph Wolfsohn was alive and a prisoner. I wrote the news home to Susan, but not being so certain of the fact then as I afterward became, I cautioned her not to raise any false hopes in Erma's bosom by telling her the news. Well, since my return, Susan has told me how fearful she and Miss Gunn had been that in case the report of Wolfsohn's life was true, that he should come home and find Erma in Clement Gladden's house, and, in the insane fury of his morbid jealousy, do—just what he has done. No, Erma, your father is right. I have known Wolfsohn from childhood; he will not come back here to seek you. And you must not earn his contempt by seeking him. It would do no good."

"Then what must I do?" cried the unhappy young woman, in a voice of despair.

"Be patient and trust in Providence."

CHAPTER XXI.

STARTLING A NEIGHBORHOOD.

Let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about; so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts;
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning, and forced cause:
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fallen on the inventors' heads; all this can I
Truly deliver. —SHAKESPEARE.

Capt. Blantyre kept his word in undertaking to break the startling news of Otho Herne's reappearance in the neighborhood, and of his relationship to Erma Wolfsohn, among the friends and acquaintances of that lady.

The captain's first announcement of this intelligence was made to his wife, immediately after his return from his visit to Brighthome.

"Well, I am not the least surprised," said Susan Blantyre, rather tartly, "not the least in the world. I always took James Aleyn, alias Otho Herne, to be Erma Wolf-

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sohn's near relative; but I imagined him to be her brother. He turns out to be her father—that is all."

"Yes, that is all, Sukey," assented the captain, in an amicable and conciliatory spirit.

"But all the same, I think you might have taken me into your confidence from the beginning," added the lady, with some asperity.

"But, my love, don't you see——" began the captain, deprecatingly.

She cut him short.

"Oh, yes, I can see the necessity of keeping such a secret, for the time being, from such reckless or gossiping persons as Miss Barbra Gunn, or Mrs. Nelly Morset, and, indeed, from all others in the neighborhood except myself. But I do think it rather hard that you should have kept it from me. You might have been sure of my charity in judging all parties, and my discretion in guarding the secret," persisted Susan, with a grieved and injured air.

"My dearest Sukey, Erma and I were sure of both. But the rule of secrecy imposed upon us was an absolute one, admitting of no exceptions," said Capt. Blantyre, in his most persuasive manner.

"Well, I forgive you both, though you don't deserve that I should. And I will even go and call on Erma and her father to-morrow, and invite them to come and spend a few weeks with us, as soon as she is able to travel. That will be a good plan for putting them in their proper position before the neighbors, will it not?" inquired Susan, still divided between pique and pity.

"Excellent, my dearest Sukey. Just like your thoughtful, benevolent self," exclaimed the captain, cordially.

As it was now late, Capt. Blantyre deferred his tour among the neighbors until the next day; but very soon after breakfast he set out on his self-imposed mission.

Mounted on his best saddle horse he rode down the hills and crossed "Cousin Wally's Bridge," as the railway track over the river continued to be called, and rode on to The Marsh to see Miss Barbra Gunn.

He was so unfortunate as to find the old amazon in a whirlwind of wrath.

A calf born out of due season had died, and all the

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negroes on the plantation were to be immediately hanged, drawn and quartered for its alleged murder.

At least such seemed to be the aspect of affairs as the captain rode up before the old house.

Miss Gunn moderated her wrath as she turned to meet her visitors.

"Well, Russ Blantyre, so you have had the decency to come and see an old friend at last," was the manner of her greeting.

"My dear lady, I have been home but three days," said the captain, apologetically, as he alighted from his saddle and threw the bridle to old Jehial, who, glad of any excuse to fly from before the awful face of his mistress, took it and led the horse away to the stables.

"Three days, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Gunn, contemptuously. "If you had not been home more than three hours, you should have made me a visit before now. Come in the house."

She led the way, and the captain followed her. She gave him a chair, took another herself before the blazing wood fire, that was so genially welcome on this frosty first day of October.

Then she ordered Minny, who was in attendance, to bring in a decanter of blackberry bounce and some wine-glasses. Finally she settled herself for a good gossip, which she ordered to be served up instantly by saying:

"Now, Russ Blantyre, tell me all about that long Mexican War, and begin at the beginning."

The worthy captain started and looked aghast. To disobey Miss Barbra Gunn's command was dangerous. To obey it was impossible. What? Begin at the beginning and tell all about the Mexican War at one sitting? The captain felt himself dumfounded for a moment; but he quickly recovered himself, and told his questioner that he had something of more vital interest nearer home to tell about.

The blackberry bounce arrived at this moment, and made a little diversion.

After the captain had helped his hostess and himself to a glass apiece, and sipped his own portion, and hypocritically declared it to be superior to all the finest wines

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of France or Germany, the old lady told him to go on with what he had to say, and she settled herself to listen.

The captain repeated his story of the reappearance of Otho Herne in the neighborhood, and of his relationship to Erma Wolfsohn.

"Humph! So he was the sulky fellow who dropped down on us a day or two ago. I thought he said his name was Horn, or Van Horn, or some such outlandish thing?"

"Herne," amended Capt. Blantyre.

"Yes, of course, 'Herne'—Otho Herne! He was inquiring after Rodolph Wolfsohn, to be sure. I thought by that he must be a great stranger in the neighborhood, not to know that Rodolph Wolfsohn has been dead and gone these two years past, for he is dead and gone, I suppose, Russ? That report of his being a captive among the Indians must have been a false one?"

"I did not succeed in finding any trace of him in Mexico, as I had hoped to do," said the captain, evasively.

"Of course you didn't I only wonder at a man of your sense being led such a wild-goose chase by a cock and bull story like that. And this Otho Herne comes here inquiring after Rodolph Wolfsohn? And he is Erma Wolfsohn's father, and your brother-in-law, you say?"

"Yes, Miss Gunn."

"And you have known that ever since Erma Wildering first came down into this neighborhood?"

"Of course I have."

"And kept the knowledge to yourself!"

"Yes, madam."

"Well, Russell Blantyre," said the old lady, with offended dignity, "I really do not think that you should have kept me in the dark all this time! You should have told me! It was very disrespectful of you and Erma to keep such a thing from me!"

"But, my dear Miss Gunn——"

She snapped his head off in an instant.

"Shut up! Don't attempt to apologize, or explain! I am not an idiot! Of course, I can comprehend clearly enough the urgent necessity of keeping such a secret, for a time at least, from such hair-brained, tattling fools as your wife Susan and my nieces, and, in fact, from everybody else in the neighborhood except myself! But I am

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the head of the family and of the whole tribe! I should have been informed of all this from the first. I might have given good counsel and valuable assistance in the time of need," added the old lady, wrathfully.

"My niece and I know that your wisdom and goodness would have afforded the greatest possible aid and comfort in that time of trial, but we had no choice. The law of silence which ruled us was as strict as the laws of the Medes and Persians, admitting of no repeal," said the captain, deprecatingly.

"Well, I suppose I must pardon you both, though I declare to mankind I would not do it, only that to-morrow is Communion Sunday, and I am bound to be at peace and in charity with my neighbors. But now go along about your business, Russell Blantyre! The sight of you aggravates me; and the sooner you are out of my house and the longer you keep away the better I shall like it. But I pardon you, mind—I pardon you because to-morrow is Communion Sunday. To keep such a secret as that from me, indeed!"

Now one would suppose that a gentleman, being turned out of a lady's house, in that summary manner, would depart in high dudgeon, metaphorically shaking the dust off his shoes and really resolving never to darken those doors again.

But not so with Russell Blantyre. He knew the old lady with whom he had to deal too well.

He arose, laughing, and held out his hand, saying:

"Good-by, Miss Barbra. Sukey and I will come and spend the day with you on Monday."

"Wash day! I won't have you!"

"Tuesday, then."

"Ironing day."

"Well, Wednesday."

"Baking day."

"Thursday, then! Come, now, Thursday."

"Go to the demon!"

"All right! Thursday, and to the demon it is! Expect us!"

And, laughing, he went out, walked to the stables, to save time, found his horse, mounted him and rode off, in the direction of The Dale.

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He had two errands there—the first was, of course, in the interests of Erma Wolfsohn and her father, and was to old Mrs. Morset; but the second was even more important, being on behalf of a reptentant sinner and reformed prodigal, who was no other than "Scamp" Morset, now really regenerated, "clothed and in his right mind," and waiting in cruel suspense at Blantyre House, while he dispatched Russell Blantyre with overtures of peace to his once betrothed and still beloved Beth.

Capt. Blantyre had picked up this vagrant, who had been one of the companions of his own boyhood in the Mexican War. He had found him filling the double posts of major and chaplain in one of the Western volunteer regiments.

The poor scamp had inquired piteously after "the loved ones at home," whose affection he believed that he had justly forfeited, and learned that they were all well and prospering.

Then, in answer to Capt. Blantyre's question as to why he had not returned to his native place, the poor fellow replied:

"If my mother had been living I should have gone back, for in that case I should have found forgiveness and welcome; for no one on earth but a mother forgives and loves to the uttermost."

"Beth Morset," murmured Capt. Blantyre.

"Oh, do not name her! She cast me off—as I deserved, no doubt—but her repulse sent me farther down into the abyss, where I must have perished had not the pity of the Lord found me! Beth has found a better fellow more worthy of her, and has married well long ago, I suppose."

"Not so. She has remained faithful to her early love. Although she could not marry you, with your habits of ten years ago, she has not married anyone else! My dear boy! If she has resisted ecclesiastical fascinations so potent over women, you may judge the soundness of her faith."

"Is this so?" breathed the poor scamp, in a tone of profound emotion.

"Come home with me and see for yourself."

"Would she forgive me?"

"Since you have reformed—yes!"

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"Are you sure?"

"Try her."

"I will go back with you!" concluded the prodigal lover.

And when the war closed, the two men returned to the neighborhood together.

Morset would not depreciate his future welcome at Blantyre House by spoiling the *tête-à-tête* meeting between Capt. and Mrs. Blantyre. He arranged with Russell to remain at the Red Fox and keep out of sight for a day or two, and then to go over to Blantyre House.

He was there now, lying perdue, kindly entertained by Susan Blantyre, while waiting the issue of Russell's peace mission to Beth Morset.

As Capt. Blantyre rode up to the low, white cottage of The Dale, he resolved that the lover's business should take precedence on this occasion.

He dismounted at the horse block, threw his bridle to the colored boy who ran up to take it, and then went and rapped at the door.

He was admitted by the girl, Ruth, who at once opened a second door on her left to show him into the family sitting room—a very plain room, with whitewashed walls, a rag carpet on the floor, green paper shades at the front windows, a mahogany table between the latter, and flag-bottomed chairs arranged around the sides. Opposite the door by which he entered was the open fireplace, where a bright fire burned, and before which a little, black tea-pot simmered.

In a large armchair in the chimney corner sat the round-bodied, little, old woman in her black serge gown and white kerchief and cap—knitting.

"How do you do, Mrs. Morset?" said the captain, advancing with outstretched hand and smiling face.

The old lady looked around slowly, looked at the visitor very deliberately from head to foot, and then said, quietly:

"How do yourself, Russ? Glad to see you back safe from the wars. Never expected to, though. Good many of you didn't get back. There was poor Rody Wolfsohn. Let that be a warning to you, Russ, never to do so no more. The pitcher that goes too often to the pump comes back broke at last. Take a chair and sit down. Excuse

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my getting up. I ain't as light on my feet as I used to be. Ruth! Go fetch your Marse Russell a good, strong tumbler of peach brandy toddy."

"'Tumbler?' Yes, I do suppose it will prove a tumbler! I shall be dead drunk with all these domestic drinks before I get home," said Russell Blantyre to himself, as he took a chair and sat down before the fire.

Ruth came with a formidable half pint "tumbler" filled to the brim with a strong, pungent, odoriferous com, pound, which she handed to the guest.

"There, Russ! Try that! I don't reckon you got any such stuff as that out in them there heathen countries where you have been a-fighting," said Mrs. Morset, with unctuous self-satisfaction.

"No, indeed! Heaven knows that I did not!" exclaimed the victimized guest, trying not to make a wry face as he tasted it.

"There, now! Don't be afraid of it! It is home made," said the hostess.

"I see it is! What is Otard, Hennessy, London Dock, Cogniac, any of the celebrated, world-renowned brandies, compared to this!" exclaimed the "gay deceiver," lifting the glass between himself and the light, shutting one eye, and squinting at it with the other with the air of a connoisseur.

"Well, then, why don't you drink it?" exclaimed the old lady, who was fondly watching him all the time. "Don't be afraid. There's plenty more. Ruth! Ruth! Go bring the jimmyjohn!"

"My dear madam," said the dismayed captain, "I'm—I'm not afraid! That is—I know you have a-plenty, and are very kind. But the fact is—drinking those abominable French and German wines that they have in cities has so congested my liver that—that—I dare not do more than taste even such pure nectar as this!"

"A congested liver! Ruth! Ruth! Run in the dining room and look in the right-hand cupboard of the sideboard, and bring me that bottle of bitters. It's quassia, gentian, snakeroot, wormwood and aloes, and it's prime for the liver," added Mrs. Morset.

Capt. Blantyre felt as if he were in the clutches of some horrible destiny, or else that he had the nightmare and

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could not wake up—especially when Ruth came back, and Mrs. Morset poured out a glassful of this liquid, bitter as gall, and pressed it upon him.

"Let me see," said the unhappy captain, examining the label on the bottle by way of gaining time, a "'wineglassful before meals.' My dear lady, if you will allow me to pour this glassful back into the bottle, and take the bottle home with me for daily use, I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

"Certainly, Russ, if you want it. That would be better, too, for a single glass wouldn't do you much good, anyways, and it might make you very hungry before you are ready for your dinner. Yes, pour it back, and take it all home with you," said the old lady, amicably.

"Mrs. Morset, you are the kindest soul alive!" said Capt. Blantyre, very sincerely—though, all the same, he meant to drop that bottle of bitters into Low River while crossing "Wally's Bridge."

"Not I; but I like to do people good when I can," replied the old lady, slowly rocking her round body back and forth in her rocking-chair.

"Where are the other ladies?" inquired the captain, who was anxious to do his errand to Miss Beth.

"Why, they have both gone out. Beth has gone to Brighthome to stop a while with Erma Wolfsohn. She's in sorrow on account of the death of Clemmy Gladden, who was like a father to her. Yes, she's in trouble, and did you ever know anybody to be in trouble, and Beth Morset not on the spot to do what she could for them?"

"She's an angel of mercy, I know."

"She ought to a been a Sister of Charity, if there was any Protestant Sisters of Charity. That's what she ought to have been. And Betty, she's gone on farther—gone to your house."

"Has she? Well, Sukey is home, and she will be glad to see her. And so Miss Beth has gone to Brighthome to comfort Mrs. Wolfsohn?" remarked the captain, by way of leading up to the story he had to tell.

"Yes—if she can. And if she can't, I don't know anyone else who can."

"No, nor I. Yet Mrs. Wolfsohn has another comforter."

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"'Another comforter!'"

"Yes."

"What other? Who do you mean?"

"Allow me to explain," said the captain.

He then began the thrice-told tale of Otho Herne, alias James Aleyn's reappearance in the neighborhood, of his full vindication before the law and before the public, and of his close relationship to Erma.

Mrs. Morset rocked her round body slowly to and fro, and took snuff at intervals during the recital.

"Now, Russ Blantyre," she said, at the close of the narrative, "you'll bear me witness that I said from the very first that there was something queer about that there girl. 'Deed, I was feared it was something worse than it has turned out to be. So that was the mare's nest! Her father a convict!"

"But he was vindicated afterwards."

"I know that. That is the reason why I said things were not so bad as I once did fear they was. I'm not uncharitable, Russ Blantyre."

"I know you are not, my dear lady."

"But, same time, it does stand to reason that as long as you knew this secret you should have told me."

"My dear madam——"

"Hold your tongue, Russ Blantyre! Don't try to excuse yourself, for you can't. You ought to have told me all about it. You know on your own conscience you ought. You oughtn't to have told everybody—'deed, come to think of it, you oughtn't to have told anybody else, but you ought to have told me."

"My good lady——"

"Don't speak to me! Don't say a word! I shouldn't have expected you to tell such a secret to such a lunatic as Barbra Gunn, who would a been sure to made a fool of herself—but me, a steady widow woman, who has seen the world, and could have given good counsel to the motherless young thing! It was very wrong in you, Russ Blantyre. Very wrong, indeed."

"I am extremely sorry, Mrs. Morset. I hope you will forgive me," said the captain, submissively, while he laughed in his sleeve at the egotism of his neighbors.

"I am sorry myself," said Mrs. Morset. "But I am

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sorrier on her account than I am on my own. I will go to see her a Monday, and I will invite them both to dinner to meet some of the neighbors as soon as she gets well. Very careless of her to go slipping down on the waxed floor and breaking her leg. As for you, Russ Blantyre—yes, of course, I forgive you. We must forgive our enemies, or we won't be forgiven."

Capt. Blantyre bowed and smiled in acknowledgment of this grace and arose to go.

"Don't forget the bitters. A glassful three times a day before meals."

"Thanks very much, Mrs. Morset, I shall remember," said Capt. Blantyre, as he shook hands on departing.

CHAPTER XXII.

SPREADING THE NEWS.

They gather round the man of news,
And listen with their mouths wide open—
Some scold, some sigh, some shake their heads,
And all do judge it most amazing strange.
—MARVEN.

Outside the house door, he threw himself into his saddle and rode away toward The Hill, for his next errand was to Gen. Bibb.

"Praise be to all the saints I have no more women to confess to! I have been spanked by the women about as much as I can stand in one day! There remain now only Bibb and the rector. Let us see how they will receive my confession. Will each of them feel individually outraged because he was not selected from the first as a depository for our confidence?"

Yes; Capt. Blantyre's forebodings were correct. Each of these gentlemen, on being interviewed, thought he himself especially had been humiliated when left out of the secret.

Said Gen. Bibb, whom Capt. Blantyre found in his sitting room, engaged in reading the *North American Review,* and to whom the visitor told the whole story:

"Everyone must grant that you were quite right in keeping this affair from the knowledge of babbling

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women and peering men—from all, in fact, with one exception—myself."

"Yes, general; but——"

"Excuse me; I am the oldest man in the county, a deacon in the church, a vestryman, a trustee of the poor, and a justice of the peace. I am, in fact, the patriarch of the community. An important matter like this should have been submitted to me at the very outset."

"My dear general——"

"Pardon me, Blantyre, if I say that I really do feel this matter quite deeply. I had supposed that I was held in more esteem by my friends—by Mrs. Wolfsohn and yourself, especially."

"But, my dear friend——"

"There! there! You did wrong, my boy! You did wrong! and you should confess it."

"Gen. Bibb, you are a magistrate, I believe?" exclaimed Capt. Blantyre, with a sudden change of tone.

"At your service, my dear fellow."

"Then please to be so good as to do me the favor of committing me to prison!"

"Eh!"

"I am sick and tired of being tried by public opinion! I want to be tried by a jury of my countrymen!"

"What in the demon are you talking about, man?"

"Commit me for trial, I say. You can make it misdemeanor, arson, burglary, suicide—or—philanthropy—the gravest crime of all, as it appears!"

"Are you drunk, or crazy, man?"

But Capt. Blantyre had flung himself out of the house and into his saddle, leaving the old general standing there and staring after him.

"And now to the rector—and then the trial will be over! And then I'll be-e-e-e-e-e-e doomed if ever I do a good-natured thing again as long as I live in this world!"

It was quite late in the afternoon when Capt. Blantyre drew rein at the gate of the rectory of St. James, Ice Cliff.

He was shown into the study, where he found Dr. Cleveland resting after a day's labor.

As soon as the first greetings were over he sat down, and for the last time told his tale.

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The rector listened with gravity.

"I knew, of course, that there was some concealment in Erma Wildering's life. I never knew its nature, nor ever once thought ill of the young lady herself. I have some confidence in my own reading of character, and I knew I had read hers aright. I should still have believed in her, even if I had not had the bishop's letter to support my own opinion," said Dr. Cleveland.

Capt. Blantyre bowed.

"Still, I must say——" began the rector, but the captain winced, and exclaimed:

"Oh, pray, pray do not say it!"

"Say what, my dear friend? I was not going to say anything harsh; far from it. I was only about to express my sorrow—my deep, heartfelt sorrow—that this trouble had not been confided to me from the first."

Capt. Blantyre sighed.

"Of a certainty this was not an affair to be publicly made known and discussed where the facts would be likely to be misunderstood and misrepresented; but to me, her pastor, her friend, her spiritual adviser, her story should have been told!" said the rector, with a pathetic look of contemned virtue.

Capt. Blantyre groaned.

"It might have been, and probably would have been, most painful to her to have entered upon the subject of her sorrows with me, or with anyone," pursued the rector; "but you, her uncle, might have been the meduim of communication, and put me in possession of the facts! You should have done so, my dear friend! You should have done so!"

"Dr. Cleveland," burst forth the poor captain, "is there any ecclesiastical court in our mother church where a delinquent layman can be sent up for judgment? Is it the House of Bishops? If so, will you please to be so good as to do me the favor to send me up?"

"Pooh! pooh! my dear friend, you are irritated," said the rector, good-humoredly.

"I am sick and tired in body and soul with being tried by irresponsible public opinion! I came out this morning on the benevolent mission of announcing certain news, and certain explanations that should set Erma Wolfschn

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and her father in a proper light before this community! In return for my good intentions and weary wanderings, I have been badgered by the women, and bullied by the men, and abused by both, until, if I were a quarrelsome man, or had not had enough of fighting in Mexico, I should have half a dozen duels on my hands!"

"Tut! tut! captain! Tut! tut! As for myself, I only felt that I might have done some good if I had known the situation, that is all. Come, come, lay off your overcoat, and settle yourself down to spend an evening with me. My bachelor tea will be ready in half an hour," said the rector, in a friendly tone.

"Thanks," answered Blantyre, readily responding to Dr. Cleveland's cordiality. "I really would like to do so, but now I must hurry home. I have been absent all day."

"Very well, then; come some other evening. And see here, Blantyre, I shall go over to Brighthome on Monday morning to call on our friends."

"Thanks, doctor, and good-night," replied the captain, rising to go.

As he rode away from the rectory, it suddenly occurred to him that he was not at liberty to hurry home, as he had intended to do. He must not go home and disappoint "the major" by telling him that he had not succeeded in seeing Miss Beth! No! He must go on to Brighthome, and carry thither his overtures of peace to the lady.

He pressed forward as fast as he dared to urge his tired steed.

It was two hours after dark when he reached the house.

He found Otho Herne alone in the drawing room, seated in a comfortable armchair before the fire, wrapped in Clement Gladden's old purple dressing gown, which had been placed at his service by Jugurtha—and reading the last number of Blackwood by the light of a shaded lamp.

Otho Herne laid down the book to receive his friend.

Russell Blantyre, standing with one hand resting on the table, very briefly gave an account of his day's work, omitting the "badgerings" and "bullyings" he had himself personally received, and speaking only of the friendly

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spirit manifested by the neighbors toward Erma Wolfsohn and her father.

"And you are likely to have a levee here on Monday morning, each party having elected to call on you that day as the first available one—to-morrow being the Sabbath," concluded Blantyre.

"This will please Erma. I thank them all. Why don't you sit down, Russell? I asked you before, did not I?"

"Yes, but I cannot now. Is Miss Beth Morset still here?"

"Yes, she is upstairs with Erma."

"Will you send some one to say that I would like to have a few moments' conversation with her in the library?"

"I will go myself and send her down to you here, where it is pleasanter than in the library, and I will stay with Erma and gladden her spirit with the news of her neighbors' kindness," said Otho Herne, as he arose and left the parlor.

Capt. Blantyre walked restlessly about the room until the door opened and Miss Beth came in—tall, slim, fair, flaxen-haired and dressed in the plain, soft, neutral-tinted cashmere that she liked.

Capt. Blantyre thought how delicately pretty she was, yet how pale, prim and old maidish.

She had not seen the captain since his return from Mexico, and now she advanced with an extended hand and a demure smile to welcome him.

"I am very happy to see you home safe from your perilous absence, captain," she said, cordially.

"Thank you, my dear. Sit down," replied Blantyre, handing her toward Otho Herne's vacated armchair, and taking another for himself.

"I have just learned from Erma Wolfsohn the sad story of her life," began Miss Beth, in a plaintive voice.

"And now you know all about it?"

"All."

"Well, and what do you think of it?" inquired the ill-starred visitor; for it was a most unlucky question.

"What do I think?" repeated Miss Beth, with her flaxen head resting on her fair hand. "Well, if you had not asked me I should not have told you, for I am not given

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to utter complaints or to make reproaches, but this is what I think, that, in common justice to me, I should have been told before this. I do not say that anyone else should have been let into the secret, but I should have been—I, who was the most intimate, confidential friend Erma had in the whole neighborhood. I, who was with her in all her troubles and trials, in all her sicknesses—I, who never let anything keep me from coming to her, whenever she needed me."

"The L-o-r-d deliver me!" wailed Blantyre, in the silent depths of his own spirit.

"It is not my vanity that is wounded in this matter, Capt. Blantyre! It is my affection for Erma that is hurt! I could have been such a comfort to her, if she had opened her heart to me. We could have talked her affairs over as we sat alone together in the long days I passed with her. It would have been a great relief to her to have unburdened her heart to me, instead of brooding over her sorrows in secret. And I would have been so faithful to her. Her confidences should have been as sacred as if they had been committed to a father confessor! Yes, I am deeply wounded by the knowledge that Erma could not trust me so far."

"I hope you have not expressed this feeling to Erma?" inquired the captain.

"I? Of course not! She is suffering and sensitive. Besides, I am not angry, or even displeased. I am only deeply wounded," said Miss Beth, in conclusion.

"Well, now, then let us talk of something else," cheerfully exclaimed the captain.

"With all my heart," assented Miss Beth.

"Perhaps I can find a balm for your wounded spirit, my dear."

"Now you are talking of the same thing."

"To be sure! Well, then, I will change the subject. Miss Beth, I did not come alone from Mexico."

"No, don't change the subject until you have told me what you mean by saying that perhaps you can find a balm for my wounded spirit—if, indeed, you mean anything."

"I have told you, my dear. I have just told you that I did not come alone from Mexico."

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"But what has that fact to do with me or your balm?"

"Everything! For if I did not come alone from Mexico, it was because I brought your balm with me."

"I do not know what you mean, Capt. Blantyre."

"I brought a dear friend of yours home with me."

"A—dear—friend?" repeated Miss Beth, slowly. "I have not one in the world outside of this neighborhood."

"No? But you had one in years past."

Miss Beth started, and a lovely, delicate flush overspread the fair pallor of her face.

"Think of any friend you had years ago whom you would like now to see," said Capt. Blantyre, in a grave, sympathetic tone.

"There is none—none—none," said Miss Beth, in a low, wailing tone, as the rosy flush died away and a tremor shook her fragile frame.

"My dear, did you ever hear of that sweet old Bible story called The Prodigal Son?" murmured the captain, in a serious, significant tone.

"Oh, don't—don't——" faltered Miss Beth.

"Do not tremble so, my child. You know that we have known all about this from the beginning. Now calm yourself, Beth, and listen to me, dear, will you not?"

"I—will—try," she murmured, faintly.

"That is right. Now, I will tell you—not the sweet old story of the prodigal son, but a sweet new story of a prodigal lover. It is ten years, is it not, since you finally broke with Tom Morset and sent him away?"

"Yes," she breathed, very faintly.

"You were just twenty, then, and he twenty-five."

"Yes."

"And now you are thirty, though you look five years younger; and he is thirty-five, though he looks ten years older."

"Oh, does he! Is he so much broken?" exclaimed Miss Beth, anxiously, quite startled out of her sad silence.

"Yes, but since it is not by time that he is broken, he may be mended, you know. What I was about to say in respect to your ages is, that you have no time to lose in hesitation."

"You would not have me marry with the prospect of misery to both of us?"

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"By no means; but there is no such prospect."

"Ah, Capt. Blantyre, there is no hope in this world for a confirmed inebriate," sighed Miss Beth, beginning to weep.

"But he is not a confirmed inebriate. He is not an inebriate at all. He is not even a drinking man, not having tasted any form of intoxicating liquor since your expulsion of him ten years ago, Beth—a severe lesson, but an effectual one, my dear. No! he is no longer a slave to his old ruinous habits, Beth. If he were I should not be his ambassador."

"You come to me from him?"

"Of course I do."

"And he has remembered me all these long years, in spite of my harsh rejection?" murmured Miss Beth, plaintively, and speaking more to her own heart than to her hearer.

"Yes, even as Adam remembered lost Paradise, in spite of the angel with the flaming sword."

"Poor Tom! Oh, why did he not come back?"

"Why did not Adam return to Paradise? Because of the angel with the flaming sword. He could not; he was banished, and the edict of banishment was not revoked."

"Poor boy! Poor boy! Where did you find him, Capt. Blantyre?"

"In Mexico, doing his duty as a soldier, and as a Christian. He was both major and chaplain."

"What! Had Tom taken holy orders?"

"No, no more than Peter, the fisherman, or Matthew, the publican. The chaplain of his regiment had died in an odor of sanctity, so it was said, and Maj. Morset assumed his duties, as far as they could be discharged by a layman; conducting the services on the Sabbath—when there was no fighting to interrupt them—visiting and praying with the sick, burying the dead, and so forth."

"Tom did all that?"

"Tom did."

"How has he lived in all these years?"

"He had graduated in law some years before he left this neighborhood, had he not?"

"Oh, yes."

"I thought so."

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"But he never did anything in his profession."

"Not when you knew him."

"Did he afterward?"

"Yes. When you had driven him forth—to ruin, as we all feared—he formed a firm resolution, which he religiously kept. As I told you, he stopped drinking. He went out to St. Louis and found employment as copyist in a busy lawyer's office. In time he got admitted to practice at the bar. He has prospered and has laid by considerable money. He was enjoying a very lucrative practice when the war broke out. He volunteered, and entered the army as a private soldier; went to Mexico; took part in several severe engagements with the enemy; got wounded several times; rose to the rank of major; became acting chaplain of the regiment, and finally was found out by—myself," concluded the captain, with a bow.

"Where is he now?" inquired Miss Beth, under her breath.

"At my house, waiting the issue of this interview. What shall I say to him?"

"Tell him—that—I am very happy to hear such good news of him," said Miss Beth, slowly and hesitatingly.

"Is that all?" inquired the captain, with an air of disappointment.

"Tell him—that—I have remembered him kindly all these years."

"And is that all?"

"What more would you have me to say?"

"I would have you to say: 'Give my love to my dear Tom, and ask him to come to see me as soon as possible, for I shall rejoice to welcome him.'"

"Well, then, say that, for it is true," murmured Miss Beth, the rosy flush once more overspreading the fair, clear pallor of her delicate cheeks.

"All right. Good-night, my dear. Give my love to Erma, and tell her that I will not disturb her at this late hour, but will see her early to-morrow."

And Capt. Blantyre went away, leaving Miss Beth, for the first time in many years, gratefully, serenely happy.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A MATRIMONIAL EPIDEMIC.

The pure, open, prosperous love,
That pledg'd on earth and sealed above,
  Grows in the world's approving eye,
In friendship's smile and home's caress,
  Collecting all the heart's best ties
Into one knot of happiness. —MOORE.

The next day being Sunday, Miss Beth left Erma in the care of her father, and went to church in the little, one-horse carriage driven by Jugurtha.

It was the first Sabbath in October; the weather was very fine, and the roads were in good order, so they made excellent time and reached St. James' before the morning services were commenced.

The yard was filled with carriages and horses, and the building crowded with men and women; for, as has been said, this was their Communion Sunday, when it was usual to have a very large attendance; and on this occasion the exceptional good weather had brought out an unusually large number of people.

Miss Beth alighted, and glanced furtively around on the few men that yet lingered in the yard, perhaps to see if her reformed scamp was among them. Apparently he was not, for, after her cursory examination, she cast down her eyes and passed onward.

Jugurtha, meanwhile, tied the horse, giving him tether enough to move around and nip the grass that still remained green under the sparsely scattered autumn leaves.

Then mistress and man entered the sacred edifice.

Jugurtha went up to his roost in the colored people's gallery.

Miss Beth, with reverent, downcast eyes, passed on up the center aisle and reached her pew, near the middle of the church. It was empty, Mrs. Morset and Miss Betty not having yet arrived.

After she had offered up her short private prayer, she could not—really she could not—help casting a cautious glance toward the Blantyre pew to see if their guest was with the family at church.

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The Blantyre pew was a large double one in the corner to the right of the pulpit. It was now quite full. All the family were present. And—yes! there was another gentleman besides Capt. Blantyre. Miss Beth's heart seemed to stand still at the discovery.

That corner pew was so distant from her, and so dusky in the shadows, that she could never have made out the identity of any one person in it by her unassisted senses; but she had no doubts as to the personality of the stranger. She felt sure that he was Thomas Gerrit Morset, her beloved, reformed scamp of a cousin and sweetheart!

Ah! from this instant of discovery devout Miss Beth could give no proper attention to the meditations befitting the day!

"The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him."

The voice of the rector uttering these impressive words recalled the Christian woman to her devotions.

The whole congregation arose. Miss Beth stood up.

At the same instant old Mrs. Morset and Miss Betty, whose approach had been unheard in the general movement, came bustling into the pew.

They were only half a minute late, but they made a disturbance, as dilatory people are sure to do.

The services proceeded without further interruption, and the sermon followed in due course.

Then came the benediction, and the dismissal of that portion of the congregation who were not communicants.

Miss Beth, as well as her aunt and cousin, stayed, and she noticed with satisfaction that the stranger in the Blantyre pew also remained.

Then the solemn and tender service absorbed her whole soul, so that she scarcely knew how time passed until a movement around her showed that the first party of communicants were going up to the altar.

Her aunt and cousin went up with that party. She also arose to follow, but seeing that the altar railings were full, she sat down again and waited for the next.

Her turn soon came, and she arose and went forward, and knelt at the altar railings with some thirty other persons. She knew that some man was kneeling by her side

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on the right; she never even saw him or glanced toward him, but she was sure that he was Tom Morset and no one else, and the prayer she offered at that sacramental altar was for his soul's welfare—that he might be saved from backsliding, and held steadfast in faith and good works to the end.

Yet, when she had partaken of the sacred elements, she went back to her pew and to her private devotions without having once glanced toward him.

The communion service occupied an hour, for the country congregation was a large one, and the rector had no assistance in his ministrations.

At the close of the service the congregation slowly left the church.

In the yard outside Miss Beth looked anxiously around for her scamp.

He was nowhere to be seen.

Then she looked around for the Blantyre party.

But they and their great, lumbering old carry-all had disappeared.

"Are you going home with us, Beth?" inquired old Mrs. Morset, on her way to her carriage.

"No, Aunt Nelly; I am going back to Brighthome, to stay with Erma until she gets well."

"Humph! Of course you have seen this Mr. Herne, Beth; what is he like?"

"He is a tall, fair-complexioned, gray-haired, fine-looking old gentleman, Aunt Nelly."

"Humph! Then I don't see how he could have been the same as Aleyn, who was as dark as a mulatto, with full suit of black hair and beard," said Mrs. Morset.

Miss Beth did not dispute the facts; she was glancing furtively around in the forlorn hope of discovering her poor prodigal.

"Well! You tell Rody Wolfsohn's widow I am coming to see her to-morrow, do you hear?" inquired the old lady, as she tumbled up into her carriage, with the help of Miss Betty and the coachman.

"I will be sure to tell her, and I know she will be glad to see you, Aunt Nelly," answered Miss Beth, hurrying away to avoid Miss Barbra Gunn, who, with her three

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nieces behind her, was bearing down upon Mrs. Morset's carriage.

"Drive out of the yard at once, Jugurtha! Do not loiter here a moment," said Miss Beth, as she hastily climbed into her own seat.

Uncle Jug loosened his horse, got up to his place, took the reins, and set out at a brisk trot.

They soon left all the other carriages far behind them, for, in fact, the owners of the vehicles in question lingered long in the church yard to exchange neighborhood news and gossip, as was their custom on a Sunday morning.

Meanwhile, Jugurtha drove on until they entered the thick forest that lay almost unbroken between Ice Cliff and Low River.

It was while they were driving through the thickest part of the forest, about half a mile from the church, that they overtook a horseman pacing very slowly along the road.

Miss Beth had uttered half a cry of surprise and delight before she could clap her hand to her lips to smother it and prevent it from bursting forth into a full cry.

Old Jug drew rein and pulled up his horse—indignation in his eyes and sarcasm on his lips.

"Young marster, I dunno who yer is, sar; but ef it is de same fing to you an' no ill conweniency, my young mist'ess an' me would be gran'ly ableeged to yer ef yer would ride on one side ob de rode or 'toder, an' not take yer half ob it right out'n de middle, which 'vents us perceedin' forrard."

Before Jugurtha had quite finished his politely ironical speech, the equestrian had turned and ridden up to the side of the carriage, where he stood, bareheaded and hat in hand, to speak to the lady within.

"Beth?"

"Oh, Tom—Tom!"

"Am I forgiven, dear?"

"Long ago! Oh, Tom!"

"And it is all right now between us?"

"All right—right—right as it can be, Tom!"

"Beth, let your servant take my horse and fall behind;

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and let me get in and drive you back to Brighthome," said the young man, lightly leaping from his saddle.

"Yes—do, Tom. Uncle Jugurtha, get down and give this gentleman your place, and do you mount his horse and drop behind the carriage."

Uncle Jug looked from the lady to the gentleman, and back again from the gentleman to the lady, but he never moved.

"Do you hear?" inquired Miss Beth.

Uncle Jug put up his leather-gloved hand, pushed up his tall, black, beaver hat—a legacy from his late master—scratched his white poll, but—kept his place.

"Do you hear?" reiterated Miss Beth, just a little impatiently.

"Wot did you say, mist'ess?" inquired the utterly perplexed and demoralized old man.

"I tell you to get down and give your seat to this gentleman, and to mount his horse and to ride behind us," responded Miss Beth.

"Oh, well! Jest as you say, young mist'ess! But he is a stranger to me, an' he might be a highway robber for wot we know," said the old man, as he very reluctantly left his seat.

"Why, Uncle Jugurtha, don't you remember me?" exclaimed Tom Morset, with something of his old, gay humor.

"No, sar, can't say as I does," freezingly replied Mr. Jugurtha Mortimer, of Brighthome.

"Why, look at me, old man! Surely you have not forgotten me! Look at me well, now!" said the stranger, laughing.

"My eyesight ain't as good as it used to be, sar, w'en——"

"You and young Tom Morset used to go out coon hunting together at night," put in the stranger.

"Eh!" cried the old man, staring with all his might.

"Ah! I thought I should startle you! Look at me now, and tell me whether you see any likeness to the young Tom Morset of those old days?"

Uncle Jug stared for a moment, and then burst into a laugh of childish delight.

"Why! He! he! he! So it is! He! he! he! Marse

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Tom Morset his own se'f! He! he! he! Oh, 'deed, I is so proud to see yer, Marse Tom! Laws a messy, 'pon my soul, ain't I a proud an' happy old colored ge'man dis day!" cried Uncle Jugurtha, squeezing, and swinging, and pumping up and down the two hands that Tom Morset had offered him.

"There, now! You will let me drive Miss Beth, and you take my horse," laughed Tom.

"Oh, won't I? An' don't I unnerstan' all about it? Laws, chillun! I's been young an' had a sweetheart ob my own in my times," said the old man, chuckling and trying to wink, as he hurried off and mounted the horse.

Tom Morset climbed into the seat beside Miss Beth, and started the horse at a brisk trot to make up for the time lost in stopping.

"I only wish to put a safe distance between us and the next coming carriages," he said, as he slackened speed at the end of another mile.

"Beth," he continued, turning his head back that he might look at her—"dear Beth, I could not bear the thought of meeting you in the churchyard among all those people who would have crowded around us. I came out quietly as soon as the service was over, threw myself into my saddle and rode down here to wait for you. So much was I afraid, too, that the other carriages would be too near. What good angel put it into your head to hurry off in advance of the others, Beth?"

"I don't know, Tom. But I felt so disappointed when I had lost all hope of seeing you in the church yard, that I wished to get home as soon as possible. Besides, I could not bear to stay there and talk."

"Were you surprised to find me on the road waiting for you, Beth?"

"Surprised and delighted, Tom."

"Did Capt. Blantyre tell you all about me, Beth?"

"Everything, Tom. And everything was greatly to your credit."

"Beth, dear, is there any reason why we should not be married very soon?"

Miss Beth dropped her eyes and grew silent.

"Ah! I do not wonder that you cannot trust me, Beth!" said the poor prodigal, in a hurt tone.

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"But I can trust you, Tom."

"Why don't you answer my question, then, dear? Is there any reason why we should not be married very soon?"

"What do you call very soon, Tom?"

"As soon as possible! I would like to be married next week—to-morrow, or even this afternoon."

"Oh, Tom! Next week would be so much too soon. We should be acting with improper haste."

"I do not think so at all, dear! But tell me how soon you will take charge of your poor reprobate to keep him straight for the rest of his life?"

"Tom, dear, we all need the help of the Lord to keep us from falling. Beyond that you do not need anyone to keep you straight, Tom."

"You have so much confidence in me, Beth?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Then why won't you marry me right off?"

"I will marry you, Tom. I have waited to do it all these years——"

"Bless you, Beth!"

"But as to the time, you know I must consult Aunt Nelly."

"Will you promise to marry me within a month, Beth?"

"I—will, yes, I will," said the girl.

"Thank you, Beth! Bless you, dear Beth! And now, dear, I wish to tell you that I have made and saved money enough to redeem my fortunes. I intend to rent and stock a large farm in this neighborhood, just as soon as I can find a place to suit me. And you shall live among your own people, Beth."

"I should prefer to do so. Tom! I hear the sound of many wheels behind us! The people are coming from church! I do not want them to overtake us! They will spoil our *tête-à-tête* and cover us with dust! Drive fast, Tom!"

The young man put whip to the horse, and they sped away swiftly toward Brighthome, soon putting a good distance between themselves and their unconscious pursuers.

"You will come home with me to Brighthome and spend the remainder of the day there. The mistress, Mrs. Wolf-

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sohn, is confirmed to her bed by an accident, and I am the mistress *pro tem.,* with all the privileges that I should enjoy in a house of my own! So you will come and spend the day and dine with us at my invitation, Tom."

"Certainly I will, with or without your invitation, my lady" said the young man, with gay defiance.

They now heard horses' hoofs behind them, and old Jugurtha rode up abreast of the carriage, out of breath, panting and exclaiming:

"'Deed, I's mighty glad you's slackened up a bit, Marse Tom, or else I should nebber hab cotched up wid you. Dese yer same hosses ob Marse Capt. Blantyre's ain't much for go. But, law! he was a sailor de bes' part o' his life, an' I do reckon as he's a better judge ob a ship nor he is ob a hoss."

Uncle Jugurtha's wisdom did not meet with its usual appreciation. The couple in the carriage were too seriously engaged by their own affairs.

But the road was getting too public, and Tom Morset again touched up his horse to such effect that they soon reached the gates of Brighthome.

Aquilo came forward to take the horse and carriage, and Miss Beth and her guest passed into the house.

They found the drawing room vacant, and learned from old Septimus, who had come in to replenish the fire, that Mr. Herne was upstairs with his daughter.

Miss Beth left Tom Morset seated in the old armchair in the chimney corner while she went to her chamber to lay off her bonnet; after which she returned to the drawing room, which was left to herself and her lover for the rest of the day.

Otho Herne met the pair at the dinner table, and was introduced to Tom Morset. After dinner he returned to Erma, leaving the lovers to their *tête-à-tête.*

It was quite late that night when Tom Morset took leave of his betrothed, with the promise to return to her the next day.

As soon as he had gone Miss Beth went up to Erma's room, where she found Mr. Herne reading aloud to his daughter.

As soon as Miss Beth entered he closed the book, laid it on the table, arose and said:

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"You are my relief guard. Your appearance is the signal for my retreat."

And he went away.

"He knows that you want to talk to me alone, dear Beth, and that I am dying to hear you. Come to me, dear. Give me your hand. Oh! Beth, I know all about it! Father told me it was Mr. Morset—a Mr. Morset—who came home with you from church to spend the day, and I knew exactly who it was. I have heard of Tom Morset,' my dear," said Erma, drawing the delicate, pale face and flaxen head down to her lips.

"He has entirely reformed," murmured Miss Beth, in a very low voice.

"Of course he has. I knew it must be so, from his presence with you. Oh, my dear Beth, I do wish you so much joy! But what is the use of wishing you that of which you have so much already that it overflows your countenance? Dear Beth, I am so pleased for your sake!"

"Thanks, thanks; your sympathy enhances my happiness; but—but—I interrupted the reading, did I not?" shyly inquired Miss Beth.

"I am glad you did. Poor father! He was growing quite hoarse. When is it to be, Beth?"

"What?" shyly inquired Miss Beth.

"Your wedding, dear."

"Oh! He—wants it to be—about the first of next month," answered the bride-elect, hesitating and flushing.

"Quite right. I must be up by that time."

"Don't you think—it is too soon?" demurely inquired Miss Beth.

"Not a day too soon! Scarcely soon enough, I should say."

"He is not going to take me away from my native place. He is looking out for a farm to rent, upon which, if he can get a long lease, he will settle and invest his capital," continued the betrothed.

"Indeed! Oh—listen, Beth! Would this place be too large for him?"

"Brighthome?"

"Yes."

"Why—are you going to let it?"

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"Yes, if I can get a reliable tenant."

"I wonder! And what are you going to do?"

"I shall take Rody and go traveling with my father."

"I do wonder!"

"Oh! dear, Beth, why should you? I have suffered so much in this neighborhood—yes! and in this country—that I wish to get far away from the place and forget the time!"

"My poor, dear child, I know you have!" said Miss Beth, stooping and pressing a kiss upon the brow of Erma.

"Is Mr. Morset coming to-morrow?" inquired the latter.

"Yes, dear."

"Then mention Brighthome to him as being to let. It is a large place, I know—larger than he would want, perhaps; but if I put it down to him at the same rate that he would have to pay for a much smaller place, he will prefer to take it, I think, and I would rather lease the place to him and you at a lower rent than let it to any stranger at a much higher. Will you mention the subject to him, Beth?"

"Yes, dear; and I assure you if anything could add to my happiness, it would be to live at this lovely place! It is the home of all others I should most desire! It is the ideal home!" said Miss Beth, with unusual enthusiasm.

"In a word, it is Brighthome," added Erma, with a smile.

"And now, my dear, I must bid you good-night, and leave you to repose," said the visitor, pointing to the mantel clock, whose hands were near the stroke of twelve.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT SPREADS.

Tho' fools spurn wedlock's gentle powers,
They who improve the golden hours
By sweet experience know
That marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the loving and the good
A Paradise below. —COTTEN.

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The next morning, Monday, they had quite a large reception at Brighthome.

All the neighbors who had promised to call, came.

Tom Morset came first, stayed longest, and, of course, went away last.

Tom Morset and Mr. Herne received the gentlemen in the drawing room.

Mrs. Wolfsohn and Miss Beth received the ladies in the bedroom of the former.

As the mistress of the house was an invalid, no one stayed to dinner, as they all would have been sure to have done if she had been up, for such was "the custom of the country," you know. On this occasion, however, the visitors made short calls, and as they came in the early hours of the forenoon, the last visitor had come and gone before 1 P. M.

Then the house was left to Erma, Otho Herne, Beth Morset and Tom.

The three last named dined together.

After dinner, as on the preceding day, Otho Herne went upstairs to sit with his daughter, leaving the betrothed pair alone together.

Then it was that Miss Beth broached the subject of renting Brighthome.

Nothing could exceed the satisfaction with which Tom Morset heard that it was to let, and would be let to him on terms within his means to pay.

He was so delighted at the prospect of getting the place, so fearful of in some way losing it, that he became impatient to secure this good fortune at once, lest in some unforeseen way it should slip through his fingers, and he insisted that his betrothed should go to Mrs. Wolfsohn at once, and "strike while the iron was hot," as he phrased it.

Miss Beth bade him not to disturb himself, for that Mrs. Wolfsohn was quite as anxious to have them for tenants, even at a low rate, as they were to get Brighthome.

But she went up to Erma's room, told her the result of her interview with Tom Morset, and afterward wrote a letter, of Erma's dictation, to Mrs. Wolfsohn's attorney at Ice Cliff, introducing Mr. Thomas Morset, and instructing the lawyer to draw up the lease in duplicate

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copies, and have them ready for signature as soon as possible.

Armed with this letter, Tom Morset took leave, promising to present it early the next morning.

The lease was to take effect on the first of the ensuing January, as was the rule in leasing farms or hiring servants in that neighborhood. This left Erma three clear months in which to make all her preparations for leaving Brighthome and going abroad for so long an absence.

The visit of the neighbors to Brighthome, made, as it was from mixed motives of curiosity and benevolence, had a very satisfactory result. All were very favorably impressed by Otho Herne, and plied him with cordial invitations to their houses. And since that visit they had all spoken of him in commendation.

This good news came in various channels to Erma's ears, and much assisted her recovery.

Before the end of the month she was up and about the house, as well and as strong as ever; but ah! not as happy. She could recover from her bodily injuries, but she could not rally from the mental shock caused by her husband's shameful accusations and cruel abandonment. She could not take refuge, either, in the righteous indignation, the virtuous resentment that her father would have had her feel and cherish. Her love exonerated her husband, and pleaded for him, that he had been as much the victim of slandering tongues and deceiving appearances as she had been of his consequent abuse and desertion. She longed and prayed to see him, to clear herself from every shadow of suspicion, to clear his mind from the evil thoughts that possessed him, and to be fully reconciled to him, even more for his sake than for her own.

But when, if ever, should this happiness be hers? Where was he? Ah! he had gone no one knew whither. Vanished, and left no sign behind. When would he return? Ah! who could even conjecture that?

No wonder the forsaken wife's nights were sleepless, or her sleep disturbed with dreams of the absent husband. No wonder that her days were restless, with involuntary listening for horses' hoofs or carriage wheels, or a man's foot on the walk outside, "watching," ever "watching for the steps that came not back again."

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The marriage day of Tom Morset and Miss Beth drew very near.

The poor rector must have been badly hurt, for when he heard of the approaching event he managed to exchange pulpits with a brother parson at Frostridge for a few weeks to avoid the painful duty of performing the marriage ceremony that was to unite the woman whom he had loved so long to another man whom she preferred before him.

Beth and Tom's other friends and relatives looked upon the coming marriage from points of view as different as their own dispositions.

Miss Barbra Gunn went off, as usual. She swore she would forbid the banns—though there were no banns to be published, as the pair were to be married by license—that she would have Tom Morset taken up and committed to the workhouse as a dissipated vagrant—though Mr. Thomas Morset was as sober as a judge and as steady as a bishop, besides being the responsible lessee of Brighthome—and that she would have Beth Morset clapped into a lunatic asylum—though all the world knew that Miss Beth was noted for her calm, well-regulated mind and firm, level-headed good sense. But then, Miss Gunn was generally charged with more powder than shot and her explosions made more noise than mischief.

Old Mrs. Morset said that as the parties were her own nephew and niece, why, then, for decency's sake, she would give Beth her wedding clothes and wedding supper—wedding breakfasts, like morning marriage ceremonies, were disapproved by Mrs. Morset. But after that she would wash her hands of them both, for she knew that they would go straight to their earthly and everlasting ruin.

Gen. Bibb, on the contrary, stood by the lovers, and swore that his three daughters should serve as bridesmaids on the occasion, if Beth Morset wanted them.

And Beth did want them.

When the wedding day came, however, everybody cooled down and recovered their senses.

There was a bright, little, old-fashioned wedding party on the evening of All-Hallow Eve at The Dale.

All the neighborhood was present, and all brought gifts

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of more or less value, according to their means, to the bride.

Even the rejected suitor, Dr. Cleveland, "heaped coals of fire on her head" by sending the largest and handsomest Bible that could be found, enclosed in a locked case of fine rosewood, inlaid with mother of pearl, like some precious casket.

Erma was present among the other guests, and had modified her mourning habit by wearing a rich, black silk, with white *crêpe lisse ruches* at the throat and wrists, pearl earrings, brooch and bracelets, white roses in her hair and white gloves on her hands.

Her present to the bride was a full set of turquoise jewelry, these pretty Siberian stones being just then the rage.

The bride wore a rich cream-colored taffeta, trimmed with Brussels lace, and a wreath of orange flowers, from which descended at the back a veil of Brussels net. Miss Beth looked very delicate and pretty, having a soft flush upon her cheeks and a tender light in her eyes that took off at least twelve years of her age, and made her look eighteen instead of thirty.

Mrs. Morset and Miss Gunn wore their thickest and stiffest and glossiest black satins, and their highest crowned and fullest bordered lace caps.

Miss Betty Morset wore a new silver-grey silk.

The three Misses Bibb, being the bridesmaids, wore fine white organdie dresses, trimmed with valenciennes lace and wreaths of white roses on their black-haired heads.

But Mr. and Mrs. Walter Lambe! You should have seen them!

Ex-Miss Mesh, to make up for the privation of her impoverished single life, now launched forth in extravagance and out-dressed the whole county.

On this occasion she wore a mazarine blue velvet, with point lace and diamonds. And Cousin Wally fondly believed that this was a great merit in his beloved.

Young Parson Armytage, who was supplying Dr. Cleveland's place in the pulpit of St. James, performed the ceremony quite early in the evening, and Gen. Bibb gave away the bride.

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The ceremony, kissing and hand shaking were immediately succeeded by the early supper, after which the company dispersed about all the lower rooms of the house to enjoy themselves in their own way.

Erma, sitting in an armchair in the corner, because of her weak ankle, took note of much that amused her—among other things, of quite a new feature in this neighborhood's social gatherings; the pairing off of single men and women, and the new interest they seemed to take in each other.

And she thought of the old household proverb, that "One marriage makes many."

It certainly promised to prove true from this occasion.

Perhaps matrimony is contagious, or infectious! Why not? There are certainly epidemics in manners as well as in maladies. We have all heard of convulsive epidemics, of suicidal epidemics—why should there not be matrimonial epidemics?"

Certainly one seemed to be inaugurated here this evening, to judge by the way the old bachelors and old maids paired off and devoted themselves to each other.

Erma, from her seat, watched them as they filed before her in their promenade through the rooms.

There was old Gen. Bibb—but he was a widower—sauntering slowly with buxom Miss Betty Morset on his arm, his tall, martial form bent toward her until his head nearly reached hers, evidently whispering soft nonsense into her ear, with a look of admiration, as if he had suddenly discovered all her attractions for the first time, and had been taken completely by surprise.

There was Dr. Dutton, a genial, fatherly old fellow, with handsome, dark-eyed Lil Bibb on his arm, making himself so agreeable to his companion that she was beaming with enjoyment.

There was young Lawyer Drummond, Erma's own man of business, walking with saucy, sixteen-year-old Bab Bibb, and making unblushing love to her.

There were certainly three couples of bachelors and spinsters, who would, perhaps, have never thought of each other in a matrimonial point of view if they had not come here this evening and caught the infection from Miss Beth and Mr. Tom's marriage.

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While Erma sat smiling to herself over these causes and effects, Rose Bibb came suddenly and sat down by her side.

Erma turned to speak to her, and saw that the girl's beautiful dark face was overcast with discontent.

"Why, what is the matter, my damask rose?" inquired Erma, brightly and kindly. "It is not usual to see you so grave."

"I am thinking of Dr. Cleveland! Oh! it is a shame! —it is! I don't like Tom Morset at all! I do wonder how a lady of Cousin Beth's age and character could have preferred such a man, with such a character, as Tom Morset to our learned and accomplished rector! And it has hurt Dr. Cleveland so much that he left the neighborhood to avoid being present! I have been thinking of him all the evening, and when I see how everybody is enjoying themselves, I cannot help pitying him in his self-banishment at Frostridge! No, indeed, I do not like Tom Morset, and I do not approve of this marriage!" exclaimed Rose, as the tears actually filled her eyes.

"Hush! hush! my dear girl! This is all wrong—very wrong! Did not you hear what the minister said—'If any can show just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let such now speak, or else forever after hold their peace'? You must be silent on that subject, Rosie."

"Yes, I know; but I can't help thinking and wondering at Beth."

"He was her first and only love, as she was his. He reformed long since, and has stood a long probation."

"Well, but I am so sorry for the rector," persisted Rose, again on the verge of tears.

"I hope he will find a good wife," said Erma.

'Oh! indeed, I hope he will," fervently prayed Rose, clasping her hands in her earnestness.

The near approach of the promenaders now arrested this confidential conversation.

The bride had disappeared. Somebody had spirited her away.

This was the recognized signal for the dispersion of the rustic wedding party.

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All took leave and went home.

The next day Mr. and Mrs. Tom Morset left home for a bridal tour of the far South, as the most appropriate region in which to travel at this cold season of the year. They were to spend Christmas in New Orleans, and return early in January to take possession of their new residence at Brighthome, which Mrs. Wolfsohn would vacate a few days previous to that time.

On the Saturday of the second week after the marriage Dr. Cleveland returned to the charge of his own parish, and Mr. Armytage went back to Frostridge.

The rector preached to a large congregation of his people on Sunday, but everyone observed how pale and worn he looked.

"I shall take myself off to the rectory to see him tomorrow, and I will give him a good talking to," said Miss Barbra Gunn to herself, as she drove home with her nieces after the service.

Miss Gunn kept her word, for Monday morning found The Marsh gig drawn up before the rectory gate, with Jehial holding the reins, and Miss Barbra getting down to the ground.

She was admitted by the rector's man-of-all-work, and shown at once into the study, where she found Dr. Cleveland in his dressing gown, seated at his desk, apparently engaged in writing his sermon, though it seemed quite early in the week for that work.

He arose and bowed to his visitor and handed her a chair.

Miss Gunn sat bolt upright on it and fired away.

"You looked too ill to be in the pulpit yesterday, Dr. Cleveland."

"Did I? Well, I have a bad cold," replied the rector, smiling, with a pallid little smile.

"Fiddlesticks! A bad cold never made a robust young man like you look like a chicken with the pip!"

"But I am not a young man, Miss Gunn!"

"I thought you were! What are you, then? A young lady?"

"I am not young at all, Miss Gunn."

"How old are you, pray?"

"In three years I shall be forty!"

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"Never mind what you will be in three years! What you are now is more to the purpose! Thirty-seven! That is not old, but it is old enough to be married! You ought to be married, John Cleveland! The pastor of a parish ought always to be married!"

The rector winced.

"As an old member of your church, John Cleveland, and as a mother in Israel, I take the liberty of speaking to you as I would speak to a beloved son or nephew, and as I very seldom care to speak to any mortal man."

"I am sure you are very kind, Miss Gunn, and I thank you."

"Very well, then; if so, why don't you get married?" demanded Miss Barbra, sharply and irrevalently.

"My dear lady——" began the rector; but Miss Barbra snapped him up.

"Now, cut that. Did Peter or Paul ever call Dorcas or Priscilla his 'dear lady?' I ask you why you don't get married. Now, answer me that."

"Madam, because my suit did not prosper in the quarter where I ever wished to press it," replied the rector, with rebuking gravity.

"You mean Beth Morset? She was too old for you. Oh, yes; I know what you mean by that look; Tom Morset was a younger man than you, and if she was too old for you she was too old for him. Well, so she was, but they were sweethearts from childhood up, which makes a difference. I say Beth Morset was too old for you, and I say even if she wasn't, why she's married, and there's an end to it."

"Miss Gunn, for Heaven's sake, spare me!" cried the rector.

"I want you to spare yourself. And I want you to be good to yourself. I want you to remember the old proverb that there is 'as good fish in the sea as ever was caught out of it.' Oh, but your eyes have been 'holden!' You never could see any woman but Beth."

"Whom would you have me to see, Miss Gunn?" inquired the doctor, with an indulgent smile.

"My niece, Rose Bibb," answered Miss Gunn, with emphasis.

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"Rose—Bibb? What has that beautiful child in common with me?" slowly inquired the rector.

"Human nature," promptly replied Miss Gunn—"to say nothing of plenty of its faults and follies."

"I acknowledge my share, but I have known that lovely child a long time and never discovered the sign of a fault or folly in her."

"Umph! humph! She has got her share, all the same, thanks be to the fiddlers, else how should she get on in a world full of follies? And she is not a child, Dr. Cleveland. Your thinking of her as a child has prevented your seeing her as a woman. Rose Bibb is a woman, and a beautiful and good woman, Dr. Cleveland, and she has a fortune of her own, too! She'll not go a-begging for a husband, let me tell you."

"No, indeed she will not. I hope she will get one worthy of her," said the rector, earnestly.

"That's the very reason why I came to see you this morning."

"What?"

"To give you the first chance of giving her a worthy husband."

"Me!"

"Yes. You like Rose, don't you?"

"I do. I am very fond of her."

"So she is of you—very fond of you."

"But I am not in love with her."

"Neither is she with you. And so much the better for the prospect of happiness. Being 'in love' is being 'in lunacy.'"

"I—never—presumed to think of so young and beautiful and altogether lovely a girl as Rose in the light of a wife," said the rector, in the slow and reflective tone that proved that he was beginning to think of her in this way now.

"Well, then, I hope you will 'presume' to come and take tea with us next Wednesday," said Miss Gunn, as she arose to take her leave.

"I will—with pleasure."

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CHAPTER XXV.

HOPE FOR THE RECTOR.

Oh, there are looks and tones that dart
An instant's sunshine through the heart,
As if the soul that moment caught
A treasure it through life had sought. —MOORE.

Fortunate was it, for all parties concerned, that Miss Barbra Gunn had not hinted the match-making venture she had embarked upon to anyone at The Marsh.

When she returned from the rectory that Monday morning, she reached home in time for her early dinner. Her elder two nieces were there, but Bab was away at school in Blantyre House.

"I have been to the rectory to call on poor Dr. Cleveland. He looks quite fagged. I have invited him to come and take tea and spend the evening with us to-morrow. We must all try and see if we cannot cheer him up a bit," said Miss Gunn, as she took her place at the head of the table.

"Have you been to see him, really, Aunt Barbra? And invited him to tea? Oh! it was so lovely in you to do that! I am so glad!" exclaimed Rose with innocent delight. "Poor Dr. Cleveland! Dear Dr. Cleveland! Oh, Lil, we must do all in our power to enliven him and make him forget Beth and Tom Morset!" she continued, dropping into a more sedate tone.

"Yes," said Lily, assentingly, "and we will have a pair of roast ducks with celery dressing, if it is only a tea, because I know he dotes on roast ducks."

Rose was silent and slightly depressed for a few minutes, though she could not have told why, and then she rallied her spirits, and began to talk of the ways and means of making his evening's visit pass pleasantly to the rector.

As for the excellent Dr. Cleveland himself, he had spent the last six weeks—that is to say, the whole month, from the time of the announcement of the Morset marriage to the day of the wedding, and the whole fortnight from that day to the present time—in trying to drive the image of Beth Morset out of his mind. He would not think of her at all. The instant he chanced to remember her existence, he would turn his thoughts to some other sub-

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ject, or engage in some absorbing study. He continued this treatment of his mental malady until it began to succeed.

On the occasion of Miss Gunn's visit to him, he was somewhat shocked at the brave, frank, strong way in which that trenchant old woman gave him counsel, but she had set him to thinking of lovely Rose Bibb, and to feeling that he would like to spend an evening at The Marsh to get better acquainted with the sweet girl than he had ever been in all the years he had known her.

On the afternoon of the day on which he was engaged to spend the evening at The Marsh, he dressed himself with unusual care, and set out so as to reach there at "early candle light," the well-understood hour for rustic evening visits.

He came on a fine black horse, attended by his manservant, Humphrey, on a bay one.

He arrived in good time, and found the new house lighted up and the ladies in the best parlor, waiting for him.

All arose and advanced to receive him, Miss Gunn leading the way.

He shook hands heartily with them all, though he scarcely saw anyone but Rose.

She looked really very beautiful, though only in a home dress of crimson cashmere, with white thread lace frills about her throat and wrists—a costume which, however, perfectly fitted her superb form and extremely became her dark, rich, brunette beauty.

But the rector took a seat next to Lily and opposite Rose, and he talked to Lily while he watched Rose.

Miss Gunn sat bolt upright in a high-backed chair, directly before the fire, with Rose on her right hand and the rector and Lil on her left.

The conversation at first was a little stiff, it must be confessed, and ran mostly upon parochial affairs.

Dr. Cleveland spoke in high terms of his young brother in orders, the Rev. Samuel Armytage, and hoped his own congregation liked the substitute's preaching.

"Yes," said Miss Gunn, "he did well enough for a child! I have known him ever since he was born, and his mother before him. They used to spend days and weeks here,

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and made themselves as much at home in this house as if it had belonged to them. But you can't expect me, a woman near sixty years of age, to sit down and take instructions from a boy that I used to lay over my knee and instruct with the sole of my slipper!"

"Oh, Aunt Barbra!" cried Lil, before the crestfallen rector could recover his rectitude—"dear Aunt Barbra, I liked him so much! I think he was so nice!"

Rose said nothing.

"What do you think of our young brother, my dear?" inquired the rector of Rose, speaking in the same familiarly affectionate manner that he had used toward her from her childhood up.

"Oh, I liked him very much; but not so much as I like you, Dr. Cleveland! We all missed you and regretted your absence," said Rose, with innocent frankness.

"I thank you, my dear," replied the rector, more inclined to study her character than he had ever been before.

"I should like to hear him preach again! I do hope that something may happen to make you change pulpits with him again," said Lil, most innocently unconscious of offense in the words which she had uttered, with a lamentable want of tact.

The rector smiled indulgently as he said:

"The favorable impression seems to have been quite mutual, my dear child. Mr. Armytage spoke to me in warm terms of commendation of you."

"Did he?" breathed Lil, with a shamefaced little look, as she dropped her eyes.

The tea bell rang, and Miss Gunn arose in majesty to marshal her guest to the table in the adjoining room.

The best silver plate, the best Sevrès china, and the best cut glass adorned the table, which was provided with the rarest delicacies of Miss Gunn's celebrated cuisine, among which were the canvas-back ducks, dressed as only Miss Gunn's cook could dress them.

And Rose's sympathetic heart was somewhat relieved on the rector's account when she perceived how freely he partook of his favorite dainty, and how much he enjoyed it.

After tea, when they had adjourned to the parlor, Lil

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sat down to the piano. She was an excellent performer on that instrument, as well as a sweet singer; the sisters possessed fine contralto voices, and the rector a deep bass. They sang together several good, old-fashioned songs, and when they were tired of that, they looked over, together, some splendidly illustrated books that Gen. Bibb had lately given to his daughters.

Certainly, Rose and Lily kept their words, and did all in their power to make the evening pass pleasantly to the rector, and they succeeded, for it passed very happily.

Now that Dr. Cleveland's eyes were opened, and his attention directed to Rose Bibb, and he saw what an admirable creature she was, and what a charming fireside companion she would make, he wondered at his own previous blindness to her excellence; but ah! he wondered still more whether so youthful and lovely a girl could ever be won to take sufficient interest in so grave and mature a man as himself as to—to—to—to—— Oh! but the thought was too absurd! He stifled it at its birth.

Yet, on taking leave of the ladies that evening, he left Rose to the last, held her hand longer, lingered lovingly over his adieux, and pressed her hand at parting.

On his way home to the rectory that night he was thinking more of Rose than of Beth.

On rising the next morning he found Beth's deserted shrine occupied by the image of Rose. It was now of Rose he dreamed.

"Who could spend
A moment's mistrust on the end?"

The rector became a weekly visitor at The Marsh, then a semiweekly one, then a triweekly one. By this time he became the recognized suitor of Rose Bibb, and finally her accepted lover.

The marriage was appointed to take place on an early day—the Thursday before Advent Sunday—so as to give the rector an opportunity of making a short wedding tour and returning to his post in time for the Christmas church services.

And so it fell out that the second visit of the youthful and Rev. Mr. Samuel Armytage to Ice Cliff was to per-

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form the marriage ceremony between the Rev. Dr. Cleveland and Miss Rose Bibb.

The wedding took place at St. James' Church, in the presence of a large concourse of relatives, friends and acquaintances.

The bride wore a rich traveling dress of silver gray Irish poplin, trimmed with silver fox fur, a gray chinchilla hat trimmed with gray marabou feathers, and relieved by a single red damask rose, light gray kid gloves, and rich Val-au-Cachemire shawl, an heirloom in her family, and a miracle of costliness and dinginess. Her two bridesmaids, her sisters, Lil and Bab, wore silver-gray silks and gray felt hats with gray feathers. Mr. Drummond, the young lawyer from Ice Cliff, was the first groomsman to pair off with Miss Lil, the first bridesmaid, to whom he paid more than necessary attention. The other two groomsmen were young men from the village.

Gen. Bibb, of course, gave away the bride. There was no wedding feast, because the bride's house was too far distant from the church to admit of the wedding party returning thither after the ceremony; so, as soon as the services were concluded, the marriage registered, and the adieux made, "the happy pair," the very happy pair, entered the rector's plain carriage, attended by the rector's servant on horseback, and set out for the Red Fox tavern, to which their luggage had been already forwarded, and where they intended to take seats in the Staunton coach for the first stage of their journey.

After the departure of the bride and groom their friends lingered a little longer about the church and the church yard, gossiping as people will under all circumstances.

Erma, who was among them, noticed that the matrimonial epidemic was spreading.

Old Gen. Bibb had certainly made some progress in Miss Betty Morset's good graces. Dr. Dutton was devoting himself with a visibly increased ardor of hope to pretty Lil Bibb. If the grave, middle-aged rector had won the beautiful Rose to be his wife, why might not he, a grave, middle-aged physician, win the fair Lily for his bride?

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There were reasons "why not," to be sure. There was a difference; but, then, the vanity of the doctor could not see it! His rubicund face shone like a harvest moon as it bent in hopeful admiration over the lovely face of Lily.

The young lawyer, Drummond, doubly relieved from official and social duties toward the first bridesmaid, gladly availed himself of his freedom to make himself agreeable to the little, piquant Bab, who seemed to everyone else, except herself and her lover, to be a mere child. Bab was, in fact, sixteen years of age, but she looked younger, and was still a schoolfellow and classmate of little Fleurie Fleetwood.

Miss Barbra Gunn was the first to break up "the goodly company."

"Come," she said, in her trenchant tones; "it is time for us to be going home. What in the name of the dee are we waiting here for? Sam Armytage, you must go home and stay with us while you take John Cleveland's place. The rectory will be too lonesome for you, or else the old women and girls will be calling there, and you'll be getting into mischief!"

"I shall be very happy to keep out of mischief by taking refuge at The Marsh, Miss Gunn," said the young minister, with a glance half of admiration, half of jealousy, toward the spot where Dr. Dutton stood dropping soft nonsense into the ears of pretty Lil Bibb.

"'Miss Gunn,' indeed! How long have I been 'Miss Gunn' with you?" demanded the old soldier. "I used to be Aunt Barbra with you before you took holy orders and airs upon yourself!" she added, severely.

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Barbra. I did not know that I dared continue to avail myself of that boyish privilege. But I assure you I shall be proud and happy to call you Aunt Barbra, and should be still prouder and happier to have the right to do so," he added, with another glance full of admiration in the direction of Lil Babb, who was blushing and fidgeting under the severe ordeal of old Dr. Dutton's sentimental attentions.

"Jim Dutton!" exclaimed the amazon.

"Yes, Miss Gunn!" cried the old doctor, starting as if he had been struck and staring with all his might.

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"Healthy season just about now, isn't it? Nobody sick, eh?" she inquired, in a mocking tone.

"Why—it is not particulary healthy, Miss Gunn. There are many cases of pleurisy and pneumonia about."

"Oh! are there? I did not know. I had reason to think otherwise," said the old lady, in so peculiar a way that the doctor looked hard at her, and then inquired:

"What made you think so, Miss Gunn?"

"Why, to see you fooling your time away talking nonsense to a child like Lil, young enough to be your granddaughter! Oh! I've spotted you, you old idiot! There! be a man of sense! Go and tell Jehi to bring my carriage around! He has got it to the back of the church. Come here, Lil. Sam Armytage, give Lil your arm and bring her after me. You may come, too, Bob Drummond, if you like," said Miss Barbra leading the way to the front gate, where the carriage was to meet them, and followed by the Rev. Mr. Armytage, escorting Lil, and young Mr. Drummond performing the same services for Bab—all exceedingly well pleased.

"E'en a child might understand
The de'il had business on his hand."

when such pairing off of smiling youths and maidens took place in a country neighborhood.

Arrived at the gate, Mr. Armytage pressed Lil's hand and dropped it for a moment, while he helped Miss Gunn into the carriage. Then he placed Lil beside her, and made way for young Drummond to assist Bab into her seat.

"Now, Sam Armytage get in and sit down next to Bab! You'll have to ride with us, you know, because all three of the rectory horses are gone with the married couple to Ice Cliff. Bob Drummond, my boy, you have your saddle horse, I suppose?" inquired Miss Barbra.

The young lawyer bowed in assent.

"Very well then, mount and ride after us."

"Thanks, Miss Gunn. And I will make myself useful opening gates."

"Sam Armytage, why don't you mind when I speak to you? Get into the carriage when I tell you!"

"In one minute, if you will pardon me, Miss—Aunt

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Barbra. I must speak a word to the sexton, and send a message to the housekeeper in the rectory not to wait for me," said the young minister, bowing, and turning to beckon the old functionary in question, who was standing on the threshold of the church door.

A few words with the sexton and then the young minister climbed into the seat beside Bab, and gave the word to the coachman to drive home.

The carriage rolled along the road, followed by young Drummond on horseback.

"Do you see that proceeding?" inquired old Gen. Bibb of Miss Betty Morset, whom he was gallantly leading to The Dale carryall.

"Yes, I see it," answered the lady.

"Can you draw an inference?" proceeded the gentleman.

"No, I don't think I could. Indeed, I know I couldn't. I never learned drawing when I was at school. Beth did, but I preferred tapestry work," replied Miss Betty, in perfect good faith. "And, besides," she added, after a while, "I am not quite sure that I know what you mean by an inference."

"Hum—hum—hum!" muttered the general. "I don't suppose you do. Well, my dear," he continued, speaking up briskly, "what I mean is this: The rector has carried off my Rose, the 'flower of my flock.' Rectors always do these things, my dear. They make 'righteousness profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come,' but especially 'of the life that now is' they get the best. Well, the rector has got Rose. The young minister is after Lil, and the little lawyer in full cry behind Bab. They'll all be married in a month, you may take my word for it!"

"Oh! do you think so?" exclaimed Miss Betty.

"I know so, my dear! And now, what I am coming at is this: I shall be left alone. Now, my dear, suppose you have pity on a poor, lonely old fellow, and take him for your husband?"

"Oh! oh! oh! oh!" cried the old maid, more truly abashed than any young girl could have been.

"Say yes, my dear, before we reach the carriage," whis-

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pered the general, as they drew near the gate, where The Dale carryall and a group of friends were now standing.

"Oh! Oh! What would Aunt Morset say? What would everybody say?" gasped Miss Betty.

"Why, that old Curiatio Bibb had got a most excellent wife, who was a great deal too good for him, and that he was a much happier man than he deserved to be," whispered the old courtier, gallantly.

"Why don't you hurry up, there, Cu' Bibb? And what's the matter 'long o' you, Bet, sauntering along there like you had the day before you? Come, hurry up, I say!" cried the impatient voice of old Mrs. Morset, who, seated in the back of her carryall, was waiting for her niece to join her.

"I'm coming, Aunt Nelly," replied Miss Betty, nervously.

"Say yes, before we get there. Say yes, my dear girl!" whispered the general.

"Oh! Oh! I can't! Yes, then! No, I don't mean that! Oh, dear me! what shall I do?" fidgeted Miss Betty, in real and not pretended embarassment.

"Say yes, my dear."

"I can't! Oh, indeed, I can't! Never! Oh! Never!" gasped Miss Betty, as they reached the side of the carriage.

Gen. Bibb took her hand to lift her in. She took advantage of their close proximity to murmur in his ear:

"But I mean yes all the time; and thank you, too, for thinking of me."

"Heaven bless you, my dear! I will see you to-morrow," exclaimed the general, openly and cordially, as he put her in the carryall beside her aunt, who merely nodded a good-by to her brother-in-law as she gave the word to her coachman, Peter, to drive home.

Gen. Bibb mounted and rode after the carryall, his way being for many miles in the same direction.

There was one forlorn spectator of these proceedings.

Dr. Dutton, after having meekly ordered Miss Gunn's carriage, had withdrawn to the shelter of the church door, whence he watched the gradual dispersion of the crowd that filled the yard.

Among the last to go were the Morsets and Gen. Bibb.

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About the same time the old sexton approached, with an apology, to lock up the church.

Dr. Dutton moved off, and found his fat old cob grazing off the sparse grass that showed itself above the ground during this mild spell in mid December around the oak tree to which he was tethered, mounted and rode slowly off, sadly ruminating to himself:

"There they all go, passing off, and I am left alone, a solitary old bachelor, doomed to end my days in single blessedness. There is really no one left for me to marry at all. Let's see, now, who will be left after Betty Morset and Lil and Bab are married? Why, there's Miss Barbra Gunn, a single lady, but, unfortunately, twenty years older than myself, and bitterly opposed to men and matrimony. And there is old Mrs. Morset, a widow, eighteen years my elder, and afflicted with dropsy. And there's Flurry Fleetwood, a little girl fourteen years of age, and at least twenty-five years my junior, and still addicted to undesirable childish habits. There, now! There's the choice set before a man in the prime of life like myself—a choice between an old maid of sixty, with a temper like gun cotton, a widow of fifty-eight, with the dropsy and a chronic feud with good English, and lastly, a girl of fourteen, with an inordinate appetite for green fruit and green nuts, and a habitual tendency to cramps, for when her green fruit is out of season, her green nuts come in. Bah—bah—bah! None of these."

It never occurred to the worthy doctor to think "none of these" would accept him if he offered himself.

"I ought to have married fifteen or twenty years ago, or else forever after held my peace, according to the ritual," he continued, as he jogged along the road on his old white cob.

The swift sound of wheels approaching from behind interrupted his cogitations. A carriage full of ladies bowled past him.

The ladies bowed as thew sped onward.

He returned their salute by bending even to his saddle bows.

He had recognized the Blantyre coach, with handsome Mrs. Blantyre and beautiful, full-blown Mrs. Somers and lanky little Fleurie Fleetwood within.

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Dr. Dutton, having pulled up his horse, gazed after the carriage until it was out of sight, and then resumed his jog trot, exclaiming from time to time:

"Why, yes, to be sure! So there is! Lord bless my soul alive! How strange I never thought of her! But, then, she was not at the wedding that set it all agoing! I wonder why! She was not sick, I know! She is never sick! An excellent thing for a doctor's wife! He has sickness enough outside without wanting it at home! Wouldn't expose herself to the winter night's weather, I reckon! Sensible women! And the very woman for me! The woman of women for me! In person, character, habits, exactly suited to me!"

The egotist never once asked himself whether he were as well suited to her. Yet Dr. Dutton was not a bad man, nor even a vain one. He was only habitually, though quietly, self-confident.

"I will go to see Mrs. Somers to-morrow, and I will make up for lost time," he concluded, as he jogged on toward his next patient on the Ice Cliff road.

And what else came of this matrimonial epidemic?

Why, just this, that when the Rev. Dr. Cleveland brought home his bride on the Saturday before Christmas, he found four delightful duties awaiting him—first to marry the Rev. Mr. Armytage to Lily Bibb, and young lawyer Drummond to Bab. The double marriage ceremony was performed at St. James' Church the day after Christmas. Young Armytage took his bride home to the pretty parsonage at Frostridge, and Drummond took his home to a lovely villa just outside Ice Cliff. That was considered enough of a bridal tour for these two young couples at this inclement season of the year.

On the twenty-ninth of the month he pronounced the marriage benediction over Gen. Bibb and Miss Betty Morset, in the presence of a small circle of family friends assembled in the parlor at The Dale.

At the end of the moderate festivities Gen. Bibb took his wife home to The Hill, promising her a voyage to England and a tour of Europe the next summer.

But on the thirty-first of the month and the last day of the year, there was—oh! such a grand wedding at Blan-

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tyre House in honor of the marriage of Dr. Dutton and Mrs. Somers.

Capt. and Mrs. Blantyre had spared neither trouble nor expense to get up the most elegant affair of the kind that had ever been seen in the county. All the brides and grooms were there. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Morset had returned from their extended tour in time; the Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Cleveland; the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Armytage; Mr. and Mrs. Bob Drummond; Gen. Curatio and Mrs. Bibb —to say nothing of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Lambe, of older wedded bliss—were all present; and to judge from Cousin Wally's beaming baby face, he was the happiest as well as the oldest bridegroom present, and anyone might have supposed that he had been married only a few hours instead of many months.

The toilets were magnificent, but the bride's eclipsed them all. It was a superb white satin trimmed with rich white Brussels lace, with a white Brussels veil to match; garnitures of white roses, ornaments of pearl jewelry, and white kid boots and gloves.

Fleurie Fleetwood was her only bridesmaid, and Eustace was the groomsman. Dr. Cleveland performed the service, assisted by Mr. Armytage.

Capt. Blantyre gave away the bride.

After the benediction and the congratulations came the supper.

Soon after the supper, about ten o'clock, Erma retired from the company and returned home. She had come only out of good will to the Blantyres and to the bride and groom; but she had no heart to remain for the gay festivities of the later hours.

Her father attended her back to Brighthome with much more alacrity than he had escorted her to Blantyre House.

Shortly after Mrs. Wolfsohn and Mr. Herne had retired, their example was followed by Miss Barbra Gunn and Mrs. Morset, and some other of the elders of the company; not by all, however, for Gen. Bibb and Cousin Wally Lambe, with their elderly wives, remained. And then came music and dancing, and they literally "danced all night 'til broad daylight."

Early in the morning breakfast was prepared for the

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bride and groom and the guests that had feasted and frolicked the old year out and the new year in.

After breakfast the bride changed her wedding dress for a carriage costume and came down to bid her friends adieux.

And Dr. Dutton carried his wife home by the morning light of the first New Year's sun.

All said that this was such a happy omen that the newly married pair scarcely needed the help of the shower of old shoes rained after them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LEAVING BRIGHTHOME.

Why do I weep to leave the vine
Whose clusters o'er me bend,
The myrtle—yet, oh! call it mine!
The flowers I love to tend?
A thousand thoughts of all things dear,
Like shadows o'er me sweep;
I leave my peaceful refuge here,
Oh, therefore, let me weep!—FELICIA HEMANS.

The joyous New Year that brought so much of happiness to so many other hearts, brought sadness to Erma's bosom.

This was the day upon which she was to leave Brighthome! On this day Tom Morset's lease took effect, and he had the right to enter in and take possession, if he pleased to do so; but he was in no hurry, as he kindly assured Mrs. Wolfsohn; a day or so, even a week or so, could make little or no difference to him.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Morset had been staying at The Dale ever since Christmas Eve, when they had arrived to be present at Miss Betty's marriage with Gen. Bibb, and they were at liberty to stay at The Dale as long as they might like, and the longer the better, since old Mrs. Morset missed her niece, Betty, and felt very lonesome in the old farmhouse. They, therefore, begged Erma not to inconvenience herself by leaving Brighthome on New Year's Day.

Poor Erma thankfully accepted a week's reprieve.

A strange revolution had come over her spirit. Three

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months previous to this time, when she first thought of leaving Brighthome, she felt as if it would be a great relief to get away from a place where she had suffered so much, and from the day on which the lease was executed she began her preparations for leaving.

As soon as she was up and able to attend to business she had carried out the instructions of the late Clement Gladden's will. The servants on the plantation were freed, and each family was put in possession of the little hut, the little strip of land, the cow, the pig and the small sum of money left them by their late master.

But the negroes in no way changed their habits. After, as before their emancipation, they remained in the service of the household of Brighthome.

As the time for Mrs. Wolfsohn's departure drew near, her spirits sank. She began to feel that she was leaving a safe and kindly refuge for an untried world and an uncertain future. The sorrow of her colored people at the thought of separation also affected her very deeply. Poor, old Minty was almost every day in tears. When her mistress would try to console her, she could only answer:

"Ah! my dear mist'ess, ef I was a younger 'oman, I wouldn't min' it so much—your going away, I mean—for ef I was younger, my mist'ess, I should lib in de hopes ob seein' you once more in dis worl'. But I is ole, my dear mist'ess! I is ole—berry ole! I has 'cline down deep into de ole ages ob my pilgrimage t'rough dis wale ob tears. An' arter you once go 'way I can't hope to see you nebber no more! Nebber no more, my mist'ess! Nebber no more!" she wailed.

"But, dear Aunt Minty, if we meet no more on earth, we shall meet in heaven," said Erma, in a soothing tone.

But the faithful old creature refused to be comforted.

"Fuss, my husband' was tuk f'om me! Den my chillun, gals an' boys! One arter de oder! One arter de oder! 'Til all was tuk 'way f'om me! An' now you, my mist'ess! You's gwine 'way, too!"

"Oh, Aunt Minty!" said Erma, almost ready to weep, herself, "do not despond so. You will have Beth Morset. She is very good. She will be a kind friend to you."

"Miss Bet'? Well, honey, Miss Bet' is good enough, but she ain't you! No, she ain't!"

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"Is yer gwine to fall f'om grace on dat 'count?" sharply demanded a rasping voice in the rear, which Minty, turning to look, found, what she knew before, however, to appertain to the portly person of Mrs. Winny Wicket, who had just entered the kitchen, where this conversation took place.

Winny's appearance, generally, broke up all sentimental conferences.

Old Septimus was almost as full of sorrow and despondency as was his sister in the church, poor old Minty.

Their united lamentations, and what was stronger still, their silent looks of injured affection, overshadowed their mistress with grief and even with a vague remorse.

One morning, when the old man had come in to put some logs of wood on the fire, and was as tearful and sniffling as usual, she said to him:

"Septimus, you break my heart."

"Mist'ess," he answered, "you breaks mine. I goes about all day a-sayin' to myse'f, I does:

"'Here whey I had garnered up my heart!
Here whey I had garnered up my heart.'

ober an' ober again, ober an' ober again, I does, a-walkin' up an' down de house," said the old man, whimpering.

"What do you mean, Septimus?"

"Oh, my mist'ess, don't you memorize dat book wot ole Marse Otto Horne was a-reading out loud to you—an' how one poor colored ge'man, named Mr. Tello Moore, was a carrying on so 'bout a young gal wot had ill-treated him, and how he said, in such a pitiful voice:

"'Here whey I had garnered up my heart.'

Leastways, Marse Otto did read it mos' pitiful, an' I t'ought it suited me exactly. Lemmy see, now, wot did yer call dat book ag'n? Shakestick—stakepole. Yes! dat was it, mist'ess—Shakepole!"

"Don't you mean Shakespeare?" inquired Erma, half smiling.

"Lessee. Yes, mist'ess, I beliebe dat was wot you called it—Shakespeare! I knowed it was shake—somefin'! Ole marse said to you, he did—ole marse said: 'Han' me

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down Shakespeare, chile. Shakespeare knowed more ob de heart ob men den anybody out'n de Bible,' ole marse said. An' den you got de book, and me, wipin' de dust offen de chairs and tables, heard him read to you. An', oh, mist'ess, when I heard 'bout,

"'Here whey I had garnered up my heart.'

I t'ought dat jes' 'spressed me an' po' Minty," exclaimed Septimus, swallowing his tears with a gulp.

"Go and tell Minty to come here to me, Septimus, and return with her" said Erma, in a low voice.

The old man went out, sniffling.

In a few moments he returned with Minty, who was also sniffling.

They stood before their mistress, tearful and attentive.

"Do you know you both grieve me almost to death?" inquired Erma, in a soft voice.

"We—can't—help—ob it—mist'ess," sobbed Minty.

"W'ich no more'n we can't.

"'Here whey we has gardened up——'"

"Listen to me, then," said the lady, cutting short the quotation of Septimus. "You are both free. You understand that, do you not?"

"Yes, mist'ess," meekly answered Minty.

"F'ee as ole Marse Clemmy could make us; but nobody can't set anybody f'ee f'om lub, or grieb, or pain dey can't," objected Septimus.

"At least, you have a right to go where you please, and do what you please," continued Erma.

"Yes, mist'ess," again meekly assented Minty.

"No, mist'ess, we ain't got de right to go whey we please, and do wot we please!" boldly objected Septimus. "If we had we wouldn't sit down here—me and Minty wouldn't—an' griebe oursef's to deaff. 'Here whey we has gardened——'"

"Why have you not?" interrupted Erma.

"'Cause we can't go 'long o' you, mist'ess, an' folly you to de ends ob de ye'th, as we would do if we could!" boldly asserted Septimus.

"Oh-h! Hoo-o! Ooo-oo!" wept Minty.

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"Now, listen to me," said Erma, kindly. "That is just what I am coming to. My father and I will want attendance on our travels. It is true that we thought of engaging younger persons than yourselves——"

"Oh! mist'ess, we can do mo' work, me an' Minty can, dan half de good-for-nuffin' young people nowadays!" eagerly exclaimed old Septimus, as the light of hope irradiated his dark face.

Old Minty said nothing, but folded her meek hands together, trembling with expectancy.

"I was about to say, however, that the duties required of you would be so light—so very light, that even people of your age could easily and pleasantly discharge them."

"Twice ober, mist'ess! Ten times ober, mist'ess! Hond'ed times ober, mist'ess!" enthusiastically exclaimed Septimus, involuntarily lifting up first one foot and then the other, and jerking one shoulder and then the other, as if it was with extreme difficulty he could keep from dancing with joy.

Minty clasped her thin, black hands with spasmodic force and raised her meek, deerlike eyes to her mist'ess' face with a mute appeal, that said more eloquently than words could have spoken:

"Oh! do! do! do! take me to heaven with you! It will be heaven to go with you!"

"You neither of you have any ties to bind you here? Any friends or relatives from whom it would pain you to part?" inquired Erma.

"Not one, my mist'ess! Not a soul! Me and Minty is de mos' dissolute old man an' 'oman in de whole worl'," said Septimus.

" 'Desolate,' old man. You mean desolate," said Erma, who did not like the mistake at all, especially as applied to the meek and blameless Minty.

"Dat's wot I say, mist'ess! Dat's jest wot I say!" exclaimed Septimus, whose ear was not very fine. "Dissolute. Me an' Minty is perfec'ly dissolute."

"Now, Minty, let me hear from you. Uncle Septimus has been the spokesman all this while. Now, my dear Minty, speak for yourself," said Erma, kindly, turning to the old woman.

"Oh, my dear mist'ess, my heart is mos' too full! Mis-

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t'ess, I'll follow you to de ends ob de ye'th wid more joy dan I could do anyfing else in de worl'! Oh, my dear mist'ess, my po' ole heart was col' an' empty an' lonely an' dreary till you come! An' you come right into my heart an' warmed an' lightened an' 'livered it an' made me happy an' contented. Den, my mist'ess, w'en I t'ought you was goin' away, I knowed ef you did go an' leabe me, my po' heart would break, an' I would die ob grieb. But if you takes me wid you, mist'ess, I will sarve you better'n any young gal dat ebber libbed. I's ole, my mist'ess, but I's strong an' healffy. I nebber has no aches, nor yet no pains, yer know, mist'ess."

"I will take you both," said Erma, as her eyes filled with tears. "I will take you both, and never lay upon either of you a feather's weight of service more than your age can easily and pleasantly bear. Now go and begin to make your preparations for the journey. Come to me this afternoon for any money that you may want. Lose no time, for you know we are remaining here only by the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Morset, and we must not trespass on their kindness longer than necessary."

"Minty! I feel jes' 'bout sixteen years old! Don't you?" exclaimed old Septimus with dancing eyes.

Minty did not answer. She had stooped down to lift the hem of her mistress' gown to press it to her lips.

"My cheek, Minty—my cheek, dear," said Erma, gently raising the woman and offering her delicate side face to the salute.

When the two old servants had left the room, Erma fell into deep thought.

"Yes, they must both go with me, for they love me, and they would pine if left behind. They shall not be left to do this. No one shall suffer through loving me, if I can help it. Oh! I think that just to love is the very highest and best that man, woman or angel can do. And yet the poor, dumb animals can love—yes, and die for those they love! They have been know to do it, and, so far, they are the peers of men and angels. For love is just the largest boon, the richest treasure, the most precious gift, that any human or angelic being can give another. Oh, yes, it is true, as the inspired poet said:

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"'Love *is* the greatest good in the world.'"

On the following day Mr. Herne and Mrs. Wolfsohn held an informal farewell reception for all their friends. All the neighbors came, and all were sincere and cordial in their expressions of friendship and good will. Some among them gave and received substantial tokens of remembrance.

On the succeeding day, Erma and her father, with the child and the two servants, left Brighthome for New York, where, early in February, they were to take the steamer for Liverpool.

After the departure of Erma Wolfsohn from the neighborhood the community subsided into that primeval quietness which had prevailed among them before she had come to be the innocent disturber of their peace. With her disappearance the reign of excitement entirely ceased. For at least six months nothing whatever happened to quicken the pulse, much less to raise the hair, of a single inhabitant.

But at the end of that time, in the early summer, two events occurred one quickly after the other, that startled the whole community from its repose, shaking it from its center to its circumference.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SENSATION AT ICE CLIFF.

'Tis not the stoic's lesson got by rote,
The pomp of words and pedant's dissertations,
That can sustain man in that hour of terror;
Books have taught cowards to talk nobly of it,
But when the trial comes they stand aghast.
Hast thou considered what may happen after it?
How thy account may stand, and what to answer?

—ROWE.

Gustave Perlemonte, from the day of his ejection of Erma Wolfsohn and her child from their rightful home, had lived the life of a social pariah at Darkwood, avoided by all his neighbors.

So completely was he ostracized, that anyone might naturally have thought that he would have left the place.

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But apparently he intended—in the language of Miss Gunn—"to brazen it out on that ground."

Certainly, outcast though he was, he chose to remain at Darkwood, where being thus abandoned by all decent people, he sought the society of all the low politicians to be found loitering about the village taverns and corner groceries.

Two or more of these human wrecks were always staying with him at Darkwood, where they wasted days and nights in feasting, drinking and gambling.

Gustave Perlemonte, who in earlier life had been a wild fox hunter, now never followed the hounds. He was too much broken down by dissipation, too lazy, sensual and self-indulgent.

He gave himself up to gluttony and drunkenness to such an excess that his life was often endangered thereby. And the only occasions upon which any respectable man ever entered the doors of Darkwood were those when Dr. Dutton would be called to attend Mr. Perlemonte in an aggravated attack of *mania a potu*.

It was early in June following the departure of Erma Wolfsohn from Ice Cliff, when the rumor crept around the neighborhood that Mr. Perlemonte, of Darkwood, was drinking himself to death, that he was on an unusually long drunken course, that he had been drunk for a week, that he had been drunk for a fortnight, and, finally, that he had been drunk for a month.

Then, one night, Dr. Dutton was knocked up out of his bed and called to come to Darkwood to attend Mr. Perlemonte, who was very ill—in extremity, indeed.

Uttering maledictions deep, if not loud, against all inebriates, the worthy physician got up, put on his clothes, mounted his horse and started for the long ride through the summer night up and down the wooded hills that lay between Darkwood and Ice Cliff.

It was three o'clock in the morning, in "the darkest hour before the dawn," that he reached the house, and was shown into the chamber, which, that night, seemed more like the "demoniac" ward of a madhouse than a respectable sick room.

Gustave Perlemonte, held down in his bed with difficulty by the united strength of three able-bodied though

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horrified negro men, was raging like the wildest maniac —howling, struggling, foaming at the mouth, flaming at the eyes, and filling the air with blood-curdling blasphemies, while half a dozen panic-stricken negro women stood aghast in the middle of the floor.

Dr. Dutton, knowing what he might expect to find, had come prepared for the emergency.

Chloroform had but lately then come into use.

"Hold him fast!" said the doctor. "Hold him down! Don't relax your hold for an instant, but leave his face free!"

"But, Marse Doctor, we's mos' gib out," said one of the men, blowing like a steam pipe.

"No matter! Hold on a moment longer!" replied the doctor, as he took a bottle of chloroform from one pocket and a piece of sponge from the other.

To saturate the sponge with the chloroform and clap it over the patient's mouth and nose was the work of two seconds.

Three or four more violent heaves, that threatened to throw off the force of the three strong men that held him, shook the solid bedstead like a storm, and the demoniac succumbed to the influence of the drug, and became quiet.

"There, you may let him alone now," said the doctor.

"My arms is pulled out'n j'int!" groaned one of the men.

"My elbow is sprained!" cried another.

"My po' wrist is twist out'n place!" moaned the third, as they all tenderly nursed their injured limbs.

The doctor beckoned to the women, who timidly approached.

"Go get some strong new silk pocket handkerchiefs, if you can find any. We must tie this man while he is quiet, to keep him from injuring himself or others when he becomes violent again."

Willingly enough the six women flew away to do the errand of one, and they all soon returned, each waving one or more large "banana" in her hand.

The doctor neatly and carefully bound the feet and the hands of the unconscious madman, and then sent all the women, and all the men but one out of the room, while he sat down to watch with his wretched patient.

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Gustave Perlemonte had not been secured one moment too soon. As the evanescent influence of the chloroform passed off, the man returned to consciousness, and rose to fury.

I shrink from describing this terrific death bed, agonized by physical and mental suffering and desecrated by profanity and obscenity.

All that medical skill could do to alleviate pain and save life was faithfully done by Dr. Dutton, but in vain. No power on earth could save the rum-poisoned man. Before the close of another day Gustave Perlemonte had raged himself into a state of exhaustion, that, despite all medical remedies, soon passed into coma that ended in death.

Gustave Perlemonte ceased to breathe at dusk that day.

Dr. Dutton humanely closed his eyes, composed his limbs, and covered his form and face. Then the doctor locked up the chamber of death, and gave the key to one of the servants, and set off to Ice Cliff to notify the attorney of the decease of the master of Darkwood.

This attorney was no other than Robert Drummond, who had lately married Bab Bibb, and whose office at Ice Cliff was at no great distance from the doctor's own domicile.

The doctor was so fortunate as to find the young lawyer still at his writing desk, and quite alone.

"You are a very hard worker, Drummond. What does Bab say to such late business hours?" said the physician, seating himself without ceremony.

"Bab sees the necessity of work as well as I do," smilingly replied the barrister.

The doctor then entered upon the object of his visit by communicating the news.

"I am more grieved than surprised," was the comment of the hearer.

"He left no will, I presume?" ventured the doctor.

"No. He had nothing to leave, poor soul."

"I know he had only a life interest in the manor of Darkwood. I supposed that he had some personal property—one or two slaves."

"He had; but he sold them within the last six months and spent the money."

"So! Then everything else goes to the rightful heirs—

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rather to the rightful heir—young Rodolph Wolfsohn, an infant, under the sole guardianship of his mother, the widow of the late Rodolph Wolfsohn, now traveling abroad."

"Beg pardon," said the lawyer. "I think there is no late Rodolph Wolfsohn! I think the report of his death was a great mistake. We have all, I presume, heard a floating rumor of the continued existence of that man."

"Oh, yes; but who believes a story without any confirmation?"

"Pardon again. There is something very like confirmation. A short time after the departure of Mrs. Erma Wolfsohn, Mr. Perlemonte, in an hour of—well—let us say convivial frankness, confided to me the fact of a flying visit from Rodolph Wolfsohn."

"In-deed!" exclaimed the doctor, much astonished.

"Yes; and with so much of circumstantial detail that I could not doubt the truth of his statement."

"But why in the name of common sense did the man make a flying visit to the neighborhood where his wife and child remained? Why did he not stay?"

"Oh, it was told me, a fit of jealousy took him off."

"Jealousy! What of, in the name of Heaven?"

"Oh, I really, Dr. Dutton—I do not know at all! Perlemonte never told me, nor did I inquire. I mentioned the fact of the communication made to me in regard to the visit to this neighborhood by Rodolph Wolfsohn two years after his reputed death, only to make you understand why it is that we should advertise for Rodolph Wolfsohn, senior, rather than write for Rodolph Wolfsohn, junior."

"And you will do that?"

"At once, yes."

"And you will also take the direction of the funeral and look after the papers and personal effects of the deceased?"

"Yes, of course. I will notify the undertaker to-night and go over to Darkwood to-morrow."

"Very well. Then I leave everything in your hands, and if I can be of any service whatever, little or much, pray call on me," said Dr. Dutton.

"Thanks, I will," replied the young lawyer.

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The doctor then arose and took his leave.

The next morning, according to arrangement, the attorney and the undertaker went together to Darkwood.

The attorney sealed up all the secretaries, bureaus, cabinets and boxes of the deceased, and gave all the directions in regard to the funeral.

Before night the news of Gustave Perlemonte's death was bruited all over the country, and—so tender-hearted are some human creatures—many who had with good reason both hated and despised the man during his wicked lifetime, now sincerely pitied him for his untimely taking off, so that they stopped speaking ill of him whose dead lips could no longer defend himself; they even resolved to pay him the last possible tribute of neighborly kindness by attending his funeral.

On the third day following his death, the mortal remains of Gustave Perlemonte were conveyed from Darkwood, followed by a long procession of neighbors in carriages, to St. James' Church, Ice Cliff, where the funeral ceremonies were performed by Dr. Cleveland, after which they were laid in the churchyard, in a grave not far from that of his late wife.

"There let him and his deeds rest in peace. Let no one speak ill of him. It is base and cowardly to speak evil of the dead, who can't jaw back when you abuse them," was the characteristic speech of Miss Barbra Gunn to her neighbors, as they all turned from the grave to re-enter their carriages.

Dr. Dutton and Mr. Drummond, in consultation on the subject, had agreed that it would be better not to speak of the reported visit of Rodolph Wolfsohn to Darkwood, until something was discovered of his whereabouts—nor yet to advertise for him by name, but only to advertise for the next of kin to the late Zara Perlemonte, the heiress of the Lovels, of Darkwood. Of course, this next of kin was her son, Rodolph Wolfsohn, senior, if he were still in the flesh—if not it was her grandson, Rodolph Wolfsohn, junior, for the reader will please to remember that the Manor of Darkwood, which had been in the possession of the Lovels, of Darkwood, for many generations, had come to Rodolph Wolfsohn in right of his mother, their last representative, who married first a

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Wolfsohn, by whom she had this one son; and secondly, a Perlemonte, by whom she had no children at all; and that, after the decease of his wife, Perlemonte had but a life interest in Darkwood, which, at his death, lapsed to the legal heir, Rodolph Wolfsohn, senior, if he should be in life, or if not, to Roldolph Wolfsohn, junior.

Thus the lawyer's advertisement was worded to secure the next of kin, whichever of the two Rodolphs he might be.

Miss Barbra Gunn lifted up her voice against this "foolish advertisement," as she called it.

"What was the use of publicly calling for the next of kin, when everybody knew that the next of kin was a baby under three years old, who could not read the advertisement, even if he should see it, and could not understand it even if it were read to him?" she demanded, with her usual asperity.

Mr. Drummond begged leave to assure Miss Gunn, and all others interested, that he knew his own business best, and must let the advertisement stand as it stood.

A month passed, however, and no next of kin responded to the call.

"Why in the dee don't the fool write to Erma Wolfsohn and tell her that her son's inheritance has come to him at last?" fiercely inquired Miss Barbra of Dr. Dutton, one morning, when that busy physician had come to attend Jehial, who was laid up with malaria.

"By the fool, do you refer to your nephew-in-law, young Drummond?" inquired the doctor, laughing.

"What other fool is engaged in this case or could conduct it as he does?" demanded Miss Gunn.

"Well, in addition to the advertisement, he did write to Mrs. Wolfsohn immediately after the death of Perlemonte."

"Oh, he did! And why hasn't he got an answer?"

"He inclosed Mrs. Wolfsohn's letter in another one to her London bankers—the general address that she left with him. This very morning he has received a letter from them, saying that Mrs. Wolfsohn and her party had left for Egypt and the East, and that he had forwarded the letter which had been inclosed to them. But you see that the probabilities are one in a thousand whether she

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ever gets it. The mail arrangements in the regions to which she has gone are not very reliable."

"Then I suppose things must go on just as they are for the present; for, of course, there is no one to respond to that stupid advertisement, which I never could see the use of putting into the papers."

But before another week some one did respond to the advertisement.

Early one morning in July, the stagecoach from Staunton to Abington stopped to breakfast and change horses at the Red Fox.

Out of it, to the amazement of the landlord and all his satellites, who knew Rodolph Wolfsohn personally, stepped the man whom they had supposed to have been dead for three years. They hardly knew whether to welcome him as a guest or to fly from him as a ghost.

But Rodolph Wolfsohn nodded to the landlord as familiarly as if he had parted from him only the day before, and walked into the parlor, where he ordered a horse to be saddled and ready for him to ride to Ice Cliff immediately after breakfast.

He took that matutinal meal at the public table, where, indeed, he met, as he had already met in the stagecoach, several old friends and acquaintances, whom he greeted with the kindly indifference of every-day associates—thus quenching all attempts, on their part, to exclaim at his unexpected reappearance.

After breakfast he mounted his horse and rode over to Ice Cliff, where he arrived in the middle of the forenoon.

He rode directly up to Lawyer Drummond's office, dismounted at the horse block, tied his horse and walked in.

The young lawyer was alone in his room, sitting with his back to the door, and his head and shoulders bent over his desk, where he was busily engaged in copying a lease —for these were early days in the young man's practice, when he kept no clerk.

He did not look up when the visitor entered the office. Why should he, indeed, when so very many inconsequent visitors came in, to bestow their leisure hours on him, who had none?

He continued writing until Wolfsohn, who had known

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him from boyhood, came up to his side, tapped him on the shoulder, and exclaimed:

"Well, Bob! The next of kin presents himself!"

Drummond jumped up, overturning his chair in his haste, and held out his hand in welcome, exclaiming:

"I knew you would turn up, sooner or later! You saw my advertisement, of course?"

"Not until my return from a Canadian tour about a week ago," replied Wolfsohn, as they shook hands.

"Ah! you have been abroad! That is the reason for your delay in responding."

"Of course; but tell me, who is at Darkwood now?" inquired Wolfsohn, as they both sat down.

"Only the servants, of course. Your estimable wife, with her young son and her father, sailed for Europe seven months ago, while the false report of your death was still believed in this neighborhood."

"I know that; I saw their names in the list of passengers that sailed in the *Orion* on the first of February last from New York to Liverpool—else be you very sure, Drummond, I should never have responded to your advertisement—never returned to the neighborhood that held her, even to claim my patrimonial estate. No! I would sooner have—remained dead—and so forfeited all right to it," said Rodolph Wolfsohn, in a tone of such bitter animosity as excited the young lawyer's unqualified amazement.

"But why——" began Drummond.

Wolfsohn cut him short.

"Bob! if you have any respect for me, never mention that woman's name to me again!"

"I have the very greatest respect and affection for you, Wolfsohn; and that same respect and affection makes me insist on mentioning this excellent lady's name to you. What has come over you, Rodolph? Are you mad? I heard that you had come secretly to this neighborhood about nine months ago and had gone off in a fit of jealousy. I could not believe the last clause in that statement. Rodolph, we have been friends from childhood. Now tell me, what is the matter?"

"Does not all the neighborhood know that the young adventuress upon whom I madly conferred my family's

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honorable name, has degraded it?" demanded Wolfsohn, in a voice full of shame and sorrow.

"No! By my hopes of Heaven, no! Who has deluded you with such a monstrous slander?" warmly exclaimed the young lawyer.

"I had every reason to suspect her even before my mad marriage, for she kept the secret of her past life a sealed book to me. But I—infatuated fool that I was!—I married her with this secret, which she withheld from me! And well she might keep the book of her past life closed from my view, for it was the life of a wanton! the life of a thief! the life of one more often in prison than out! Faugh! Oh!" exclaimed Rodolph Wolfsohn, with a gesture of abhorrence and despair. "And I never even imagined such antecedents! I—twice sodden and thrice accursed idiot that I was—I believed in her as the embodiment of all that was most excellent and most unfortunate on earth!"

"And so she was and is!" warmly exclaimed the lawyer.

"Ugh! I fairly loath myself when I think of the besotted folly that led me to marry such a fair impostor!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, in bitter self-scorn.

"Great Heaven, Rodolph! How you will have to eat your words in sackcloth and ashes some day!"

"I eat my words in sackcloth and ashes every day. And the words that are such bitter bread to me are those I uttered at the altar when I gave my own unsullied name to her who has dragged it through the mire!"

"She never has! My life and soul on that lady's truth and probity! Rodolph, who, I ask you again, has abused your jealous mind by such monstrous calumnies?"

"Gustave Perlemonte, my late stepfather. Not a very good man, you may say, but honest and truthful in that report, for my own eyes confirmed his statement!"

"In-deed!" drawled the young lawyer, in ironical affectation of credulity.

"He told me of the life she had led in New York previous to her coming to this neighborhood. He had heard of her when he was at the North, you see, as every other newspaper reader had, for she was notorious, you see!"

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"In-deed!" exclaimed the lawyer again, with precisely the same intonation.

"And he told me of the life she led here, after the report of my death had been received and credited."

"May I ask what sort of a life he reported this to be?" inquired the young lawyer, sarcastically.

"This sort of a life!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, with a fierce stamp of his foot: "She forgot the honor of the new position to which she had been raised. She relapsed into the degrading habits of her girlhood. Faugh! Do you ask me for details, man? I cannot give them to you. She led an ill life after I had left. She led that life until the unexpected return of Gustave Perlemonte to claim his interest in Darkwood. He could have ejected her; but he was never unkind to women or children, except in the same manner in which he was unkind to himself—squandering money. No; with all his faults—and they were legion—I have always given him credit for being kind to women and children. He offered that woman a home in his house forever; but he insisted that she should dismiss her disreputable companions. This she refused to do; but she left his house, and threw herself upon the protection of one of the most obnoxious of the lot?"

"And who was he?" inquired the lawyer.

"Clement Gladden."

"A man over seventy-five years of age, and of saintly character."

"A hoary-headed hypocrite!"

"An old neighbor, whom you and your father and your grandfather before you have known from your infancy."

"And who has deceived us all in turn!"

"And you believed all this?" inquired the lawyer.

"No; not until my eyesight had confirmed the story," answered Wolfsohn.

"And did your eyesight confirm it?"

"Yes."

"In-deed!" again repeated the lawyer, with the old intonation.

"Yes! I went to Brighthome, the residence of Mr. Gladden, and there I saw proof positive of her sin and my dishonor!" exclaimed Rodolph, starting up and beginning to pace the narrow confines of the office.

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"Have you any objection to telling me what you saw, Rodolph?"

"That which made assurance doubly sure! I had left my wife at Darkwood a childless woman, then hopeless of children. Two years afterward I found her at Brighthome under the protection of Clement Gladden, with a yearling infant that called her mother, in her arms," answered Wolfsohn, in great bitterness of spirit.

"And then?"

"I left her at once, and left her forever!"

"What a pity you did not immediately institute proceedings for a divorce!"

"Drag my domestic degradation before the eyes of the public? No, indeed! I can scarcely bear to breathe of these things to you, the friend of my childhood!"

"Oh, Rodolph! Rodolph! What a credulous victim of malignity and calumny you have proved yourself to be!"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you ever happen to read a celebrated tragedy of a jealous Moor and a fair Venetian, a scheming villain and a mislaid pocket handkerchief? Oh, Rodolph! Rodolph!"

"In the name of Heaven, speak plainly!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, startled by the tone and manner of the man more than by his words.

"I can unravel your tangle in the easiest way. Your wife is good and true, Rodolph. I declare her to be so, and you yourself can readily prove her to be so."

"How? how? how? With all this evidence against her?" exclaimed Wolfsohn, almost beside himself with excitement.

"There is no evidence against her! All evidence is for her! There is nothing against her except calumny and false appearances!"

"Her past life——"

"Was as pure as the life of a child angel!"

"The secret she so carefully kept from me?"

"Was this—for it is no longer necessary to keep it from anybody——"

"What? What?" vehemently interrupted Wolfsohn.

"That her father—Otho Herne——"

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"Was she the daughter of Otho Herne, the supposed murderer of my stepfather?"

"Yes; but she did not know that the supposed murdered man was your stepfather at the time that she married you, you must understand."

"Go on."

"Her secret, then, that she jealously guarded from you and from all, because her sensitive spirit could not bear that it should be known to anyone, was this—that her father, Otho Herne, the supposed murderer of Gustave Perlemonte, was a condemned felon—a prisoner for life in the Albany penitentiary.

"His trial and condemnation killed her mother, for whom she was in deep mourning when she arrived in this neighborhood, and left her so destitute that she was compelled to earn her own living. Her one steadfast friend, Bishop Whiting, as well as her father, decided that it would be best for her to make her bread at a distance from the scene of her family misfortunes, and also to drop the name of Herne and be known only by her middle name—which was her grandmother's maiden name—of Wildering. Everybody at the time of the trial heard all about Otho Herne, a man of high social position, great pride and quick temper—once a wealthy merchant of New Orleans, but having failed in the panic of '37, he came to New York and took the position of manager in one of the mercantile houses there, where his family became much respected. Is it likely that the daughter of such a family could have been what her calumniator declared her to be?" demanded Drummond.

A fierce malediction, leveled at that "calumniator," burst from the lips of Wolfsohn.

"Now let us come to the next great item in your indictment of your wife. Her evil life here since you left her for the Mexican War, was it not?"

"Yes," growled Wolfsohn, fiercely.

"Her life was still the life of an angel blessing all around her, until the arrival of Gustave Perlemonte, who came in disguise, with mock testimonials, and engaged himself as overseer at Darkwood. He had the great wickedness to aspire to the hand of the young Widow Wolfsohn, as your wife was then called."

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"Eh!" exclaimed Rodolph, starting to his feet, with great, dilated eyes.

"And to persecute her with his suit," continued young Drummond.

Wolfsohn began to tramp up and down the floor, with his brows gathered darkly over his eyes, which were rolling ominously.

"When he found his overtures persistently rejected he threw off all disguise, announced himself as Gustave Perlemonte, the master of the house, and the life proprietor of the estate, and threatened if she did not consent to become his wife he would turn her out of doors to starve."

"Oh, the miscreant! the miscreant! Can this be true?" fiercely demanded Rodolph Wolfsohn, pausing for an instant in his wild, excited walk.

"It is as true as truth. Ask Miss Barbra Gunn, if you want another witness. Ask Mrs. Tom Morset, if you want a third one."

A furious oath escaped the lips of Wolfsohn.

"What, then, could the poor young woman do? She could not starve, nor let her child starve. She accepted the first respectable work that offered itself. It happened that a short time before this, Mr. Lambe, of The March, had married Miss Mesh, the governess of Mr. Gladden's little ward, Fance Fleetwood, who was thereby left without an instructress. Mr. Gladden offered the vacated position to Mrs. Wolfsohn, who accepted it with gratitude and with the approbation and countenance of all her friends. She went with her child to Brighthome as the salaried governess of little Fance Fleetwood. Now do you begin to see light?"

Whether Rodolph Wolfsohn began to "see light" or not, he began to curse himself even much harder than he had just cursed Gustave Perlemonte—and all in quite unreportable language.

Young Drummond showed no pity for him. With cruel persistency he recommenced his discourse, and said:

"Well! I think now I have disposed of the 'reliable testimony'; next, then, comes the evidence of your own senses."

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Wolfsohn made a gesture of desperation, but Drummond went on:

"You left your wife at Darkwood a childless woman, hopeless of children. You came back after a two years' absence to find her at Brighthome with a yearling baby on her lap that called her mother."

Wolfsohn groaned, but Drummond continued:

"This you called the evidence of your own senses. Never was man more deceived—deceived by false appearances. That child was not a yearling, as you called it! You never saw a yearling child as fine and big as that boy was then; but what, indeed, should you know of children, who never had any little brothers and sisters, or nieces and nephews of your own? That child was eighteen months old. He was born just six months after you left for Mexico, and four months after your reputed death. If you want a 'crowd of witnesses' to support my testimony, ask Dr. Dutton—ask Mrs. Blantyre—ask Miss Barbra Gunn—ask Mrs. Tom Morset—ask anybody—ask everybody!"

"I'll ask nobody!" vociferated Rodolph Wolfsohn, with a furious oath and a grasp at his own hair, as if he would have torn out the fiery dark locks by the roots. "I'll ask nobody! She told me so herself, and I believe her now, though in my moonstruck madness I would not believe her then. Oh, fool—fool—fool!"

"Go on," thought the young lawyer, within himself. "Go on! Abuse yourself as much as you please. I like to hear you, and, besides, it saves me the trouble of doing it."

And Rodolph raved on, unrebuked, for some minutes.

"You will want, I suppose, to go over the documents of the Darkwood estate with me?" at last ventured the lawyer.

Rodolph invoked a malediction upon Darkwood that propriety forbids me to set down, adding:

"I don't care a curse for Darkwood. I care only now to seek and find my wronged wife. But I must say in this connection that I am surprised to find that a young gentleman of your position and character should have consented to act as the attorney of such a man as Gustave Perlemonte."

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"Business, my dear Rodolph! Business! A poor, young lawyer, struggling into practice, cannot pick and choose his clients," replied Drummond, deprecatingly.

"Then I am surprised that you are not loyal to your client!" said Wolfsohn, maliciously, for, being in a passion with himself, he naturally felt very angry with his interlocutor.

"Death dissolves all bonds, my dear Wolfsohn, even the tender ones existing between me and my late client," answered Drummond, with some fine latent irony. "But, in any event," he added, more seriously, "after I had learned from your own lips that the late Gustave Perlemonte had so maligned the fair fame of an honorable lady as to poison the mind of her husband against her, alienate his affections from her, and drive him into exile, it became my paramount duty to expose the falsehood of the traducer and vindicate the fair fame of the traduced, even though that traducer had been my brother, as well as my client!"

"You are right! You are right! Forgive my injustice to you! But I am an accursed wretch, filled with disgust and abhorrence of myself and consequently of all the world!"

"No, no," said Drummond, gently, relenting toward him at length, "do not reproach yourself so bitterly. You are not what you have called yourself—'an accursed wretch.' You are one 'not easily jealous, but being wrought upon, perplexed in the extreme.'"

"Ah! but I am one 'easily jealous,' which made me all the readier dupe of designing slanderers. I am one very 'easily jealous,' as was also that 'noble Moor,' in whom I never could see the slightest trace of nobility! But my wife! my much-wronged, long-suffering wife! where is she now?"

"You saw that she had sailed for Europe six months ago."

"Yes, but Europe is a broad field. To what part of Europe did she go?"

"To England first—to Liverpool."

"Oh, of course, I know that! but that tells nothing! From Liverpool she might have taken passage to Con-

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stantinople or St. Petersburg!" exclaimed Rodolph, impatiently.

"She left her London bankers' address with me, that I might forward to them any letters intended for her."

"Give it me, directly!"

The young lawyer pulled out a drawer on the right-hand side of his writing desk, and took from it a leather-bound address book, from which he copied the required item, and gave it to his new client.

Rodolph Wolfsohn put it away carefully in one of the compartments of his pocketbook, and then arose to take leave, saying:

"I will write to her at once, under cover to this firm, and I will also write to them, asking for her present address by return mail."

Young Drummond had not the heart to tell him then and there that his wife had gone into Africa, far out of the reach of postal communication.

Wolfsohn, he thought, had suffered enough for one day, so he would reserve this final piece of bad news for a future occasion, or leave time only to discover it. He asked instead:

"Will you not look over with me the documents relating to Darkwood?"

"Not to-day! Not to-day!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, excitedly.

"Then will you ride over with me to Darkwood to view the estate?"

"No, no, no! I will see you to-morrow!" quickly responded Rodolph, as he left the lawyer's office.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS BARBRA GUNN'S ADVICE.

Upon her wrinkled brow alone
Nor truth nor mercy's trace is shown,
Her look is hard and stern.
—Sir Walter Scott.

He mounted his horse, and rode off in the direction of The Marsh. He wanted to see and converse with some woman who had been in intimate relations with his lost

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Erma during the two years of his own absence and supposed death. Miss Barbra Gunn occurred to him as the very woman best suited to this purpose, and though he half shrank from meeting that formidable amazon, he determined to seek her presence.

Deeply distressed as Rodolph Wolfsohn was on many accounts, he was perfectly easy on one subject—the certainty of Erma's forgiveness of himself and reconciliation with him. With the clearing up of the clouds of mystery that had obscured her, she shone forth on his memory with all the clear, bright purity he had recognized on his first acquaintance with her. He saw her, in his "mind's eye," now as he had seen her then, and with an additional halo around her image. He remembered also her tenderness, her humility, her deep, unselfish love, all of which assured him of her free forgiveness and of full reconciliation with him, when the time should come for them to meet again.

With these bitter-sweet thoughts, he rode smartly on toward The Marsh.

It was afternoon when he arrived there.

Miss Barbra Gunn had finished her dinner an hour before. She was now enjoying a rest and a doze in her armchair, in the favorite summer position, on the bare floor, before the open doors of her room in the old house.

As Wolfsohn rode into the yard, Jehial, who was taking advantage of his mistress' "snooze" and idling away the hottest hours of the midsummer day by lolling under the shade of the acacia trees, sprang up and ran forward to take the visitor's horse.

Then, on raising his eyes to the face of the rider, he recognized Rodolph Wolfsohn, and with a howl of dismay he took to his heels, shrieking with terror as he ran.

The noise aroused Miss Barbra Gunn, who started up and came to the door just as Rodolph Wolfsohn—who had dismounted and turned his horse loose to graze on the lawn—approached the house.

They met face to face.

"What!" exclaimed the amazon, raising her eyes and hands in unbounded amazement.

"Well?" coolly replied Rodolph Wolfsohn, smiling

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slightly, and feeling amused, notwithstanding his many troubles.

"Why, I thought the demon had got you long ago!" was the next complimentary remark of the old lady.

"So he has, Miss Barbra, if having an exhaustive mortgage on my soul, which he may seize at any moment, is having me," replied the returned exile, very sadly.

"Don't talk nonsense, Rody Wolfsohn! Come in and sit down! To be sure, we all did hear a rumor that the report of your death was a false one, and that you were living, a captive among the Indians, somewhere out West; but I doubted it from the first, and, of late, I altogether discredited it."

"But it was true, for all that, for here I am to prove it."

"So I see! Well, come in and sit down," said Miss Barbra, leading the way into the old house.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," observed Wolfsohn, as he followed her.

"It is a great pity that you did not turn up six months ago, before Erma left the neighborhood, and the country, too," said Miss Gunn, as she sank into her armchair, and pointed Rodolph to another one. "Yes, a thousand pities," she added, emphatically.

"But I did come back eight months ago," replied Rodolph, sinking into the offered seat.

"Eh!" exclaimed Miss Barbra, doubting the evidences of her own senses.

"I say I came back eight months ago," repeated Rodolph.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Here?"

"Yes, here."

"Now, Rodolph Wolfsohn, do you pretend to tell me that you came back to this part of the country eight months ago, or at any time before this, since you left for Mexico?" demanded Miss Gunn, with incredulous scorn.

"Indeed I do, Aunt Barbra."

"I don't believe it!—there!"

"Yet it is true, neverthless."

"If you came back why didn't you show yourself to

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some one? And why didn't you stay when you got here? What caused you to go off again?"

"Aunt Barbra, it is a painful explanation, and not to my credit; yet I will tell you, if you will listen," said the young man, with a sigh.

"Yes, tell me; I will listen."

Now, surely some malignant demon must have instigated the unfortunate man to make to Miss Barbra Gunn a confession that he might have known she would receive without pity, without mercy, and with the deepest indignation and contempt.

Anyway he told his whole story, sparing himself not the least in the world.

She heard him through ill-restrained wrath and scorn; and as soon as he had finished, her fiery temper burst forth.

"Is that all?" she demanded.

"That is all," he groaned.

"And upon such evidence as you have shown me, you believed your wife to be false to her marriage vows?"

"Heaven forgive me—I did!"

"And you charged her, an honorable woman, with conjugal infidelity?"

"I did."

"And you disowned her child?"

"Ah! Yes," moaned the young man; "but I was driven mad! mad! mad! by cunning calumnies borne out by false appearances!"

"Yet you did this? You accused her of falsehood to her marriage vows, and you disowned her child?"

"Yes."

"And—you—hope—to—be—forgiven!" demanded Miss Gunn, very slowly, and with intense scorn.

"Yes, for she is an angel, and she will forgive me."

"She is a woman, and she will never forgive you!"

"How!" exclaimed Rodolph, starting, for this was a contingency he had never contemplated as possible.

"She is an honorable woman, and she can never forgive you for slurring over with deep dishonor herself and her child, so much dearer than herself. How can she? No, Rodolph Wolfsohn; neither Erma nor her son can ever forgive that insult—that outrage—which has sev-

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ered all ties between you more effectually than ever death would have done."

"'Severed all ties between us'? In the name of Heaven, what do you mean?" demanded the young husband, in alarm.

"This: A woman may pardon every other wrong inflicted on herself—neglect, abuse, abandonment, personal violence, any and every wrong—except this offense that you have committed against her and her child, and that she will not, because she can not, pardon either in this world or in the next! It has broken all bonds between you in this world, and opened a gulf as impassable as that which divided Dives and Lazarus in the next. Man, are you such a dolt that you cannot see this?" demanded the old lady, with a stern, suppressed ferocity, judging Erma and all other women, not by her own heart, which was a good one despite her temper, but by her present state of mind, which was diabolical.

"I must appeal from your harsh decision to Erma herself," said Rodolph, grimly, in a voice half choked with emotion.

"You can't do it! She is out of your reach!" said Miss Barbra, severely.

"I know, of course, that she has gone to England with her father, but I can follow her thither."

"She has gone where neither you, nor letter, nor message can follow her with the slightest chance of finding her."

"Where, in the name of Heaven?"

"Into the extreme East, into Asia, or Africa, we do not know which. Even her London bankers have lost trace of her and her party. They may have been massacred by Arabs or eaten by cannibals by this time," said Miss Gunn, relentlessly.

"Drummond never told me that they had gone so far from civilization," muttered Rodolph, in a voice scarcely audible.

"He wished to spare you, I suppose; as he is a softhearted sort of a noodle."

The unhappy young man seemed utterly broken down by remorse and despair. He dropped his head upon his open hands and groaned:

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"What shall I do? What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Miss Barbra Gunn looked at him without pity, for her temper was still rampant.

"Do you wish me to counsel you?" she inquired, in a calm tone, that utterly deceived the victim.

"Yes, if you please," he answered, gratefully, lifting his troubled face.

"Then, if you wish to atone for your atrocities to your wife and child go out at once and—hang yourself! Or, if you object to that mode of exit, drown yourself, shoot yourself, stab yourself, poison yourself! Get yourself out of this world and out of their way, by the quickest means you can, so as to leave her to find happiness in a worthier husband's love, and her son to find protection in a worthier father's care!"

Bitter! bitter! bitter! but, then, Miss Gunn was always bitter as gall in her tempers.

Without a word of reply, Rodolph Wolfsohn arose and took his hat and walked forth from her presence.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS BOX OPENED.

Fate steals along with noiseless tread,
And meets us oft when least we dread;
Frowns in the storm with threatening brow,
Yet in the sunshine strikes the blow! —COWPER.

Rodolph Wolfsohn left Miss Barbra Gunn's presence, not at all disturbed by the sharpness of her rebuke, not the least disposed to walk out of this earthly life by any of the passages she had recommended to him, and, strange to say, not at all offended with the old lady for her unsavory advice!

He had known Miss Barbra Gunn from his infancy up, and knew exactly what her passionate denunciations amounted to.

He threw himself into his saddle and rode off to Ice Cliff, to the hotel there, where he called for a private parlor and for pen, ink and paper.

And there he wrote a long, penitent, affectionate letter

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to Erma, inclosing it in one to her London bankers, with the request that it might be forwarded.

He mailed the letter late at night and then betook himself to bed, though not to sleep.

Early in the morning he arose, and, after a hasty breakfast, mounted his horse and rode over to Brighthome, with the forlorn hope of hearing some more cheerful news of his lost wife and child.

Within the last twenty-four hours the news of Rodolph Wolfsohn's reappearance had spread throughout the neighborhood, and it now preceded him everywhere.

When he rode up to the horse block near the front of Brighthome House, young Aquilo came to meet him, with a broad grin on his face, exclaiming:

"Glad an' likewise proud to see yer, Marse Rodolph! Heerd how you was come back, sar."

"Thank you, Quil! But how did you hear this?" inquired the young gentleman, with a sad smile.

"W'y, yer see, Marse Rodolph, I went to de pos' office yes'day mornin', at Ice Cliff, an' Mr. Nelson he tole me as he sees yer ride down de village street an' go right into Marse Lawyer Drummond's office, which he went hisse'f arterward an' 'quir'd ob Marse Drummond if it was you, or a mistake, an' which Marse Drummond say how it was you, yourse'f!"

"And now you see for yourself that it was I."

"Yes, Marse Rodolph, thank goodness."

"Are your master and mistress in?"

"Marster is gone to a barbacue at de Red Fox, but mist'ess is in."

"Let her know that I am here, then, and would be glad to see her."

"Yes, marse. Here, Paul! Take dis horse an' convey him roun' to de stables," cried Aquilo, hailing a colored boy who was crossing the lawn.

The boy ran forward and took the bridle to lead away the horse.

"Now, Marse Rodolph, come in and sit down, and I will go and tell my young mist'ess," said Aquilo, gladly leading the way to the little sitting room on the right side of the hall—so fraught with sweet and bitter memories of Erma, for it was there that he had wooed her, and there

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that he had wed her, and there that he had spurned her from his bosom, denied her child, and abandoned both!

An involuntary groan burst from his breast as he thought of this, and threw himseif into a chair near the window.

Aquilo went to deliver his message to his mistress, but had scarcely left the room when old Jugurtha entered it, grinning from ear to ear.

"Sarvint, Marse Rodolph, sar! I'se moughty proud to see you! 'Deed I is! Quil he fotch de news f'om de willage dat you had 'turned home yes'day, an' Paul he came inter de kitchen an' told de news how you'd 'rove to de house here, an' he'd put up your horse inter de stables. An' I comed right in to pay my dispects," said the old man. bowing betwen every clause in his speech, and standing respectfully, hat in hand, when he had finished it.

"Thanks, Jugurtha! Believe me, I am equally happy to see you! I hope you will not take me for a ghost, however," said the young man, alluding to old Jug's terror and flight on the occasion of his last visit to Brighthome.

"Take you for a ghost? No, marster! Dough, to tell de solemn trufe, I did see yer sperrit once in dis wery house, eben yer was alibe an' somew'ere else at dat same time! I saw yer sperrit here!" said the old man, with awful gravity.

"I guess not," replied Mr. Wolfsohn, laughing in spite of his deep troubles.

"Yes, I did, marster! Your sperrit came an' 'peared to me, an' wanished jes' like any oder sperrit!"

"Did anyone else see it?" inquired Rodolph.

"No, marster, nobody but me! De sperrit 'peared to me, an' it was a warnin' ob deff an' misfortune, too! For dat se'f-same said day my ole marster—Marse Clemmy Gladden—were foun' dead in his chair, an' my young mist'ess—Miss Ermy Wolfsohn—slipped onto dis yere berry floor an' broke her ankle, an' were laid up for a mon't or more! Your sperrit didn't 'pear for nuffin', Marse Rody!" concluded the old man, solemnly shaking his head.

"Did you tell anybody about your seeing this 'sperrit'?" inquired Mr. Wolfsohn.

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"Yes, sar! I tole eberbody which, an' nobody would beliebe me! Called me a moonatic, an' dat sort! But I did see yer sperrit, for all dat, marster! I did! An' it didn't 'pear to me for no good, it didn't, 'cause ob wot followed!"

"Did you tell your mistress of what you saw?" inquired Mr. Wolfsohn, with a purpose in his seemingly careless question.

"I did, marster."

"Did she refuse to believe you, and call you a lunatic?"

"Oh, no, marster; she listened to me ser'us as possible, an' den she tole me to try an' find out, quiet, whedder anybody else had seed yer sperrit. An' so I did, marster, an' got nuffin' but 'buse an' redicule for my pains; for nobody hadn't seed nuffin' ob no sperrit but me."

"Poor girl! poor girl!" muttered Rodolph to himself. "She wished to find out where I was without speaking of my visit and exposing my brutality."

"An' at last, marster, I done stop talkin' 'bout yer sperrit, 'cause it wa'n't no use. But I did see yer sperrit all de same."

Rodolph left the old man to his fond illusions, and was fortunately saved the necessity of a reply by the entrance of Mrs. Tom Morset.

Mrs. Tom Morset, late Miss Beth, had vastly improved in health and beauty since her marriage. From a thin, pale, plain spinster she had changed into a plump, rosy, handsome matron, and her nunlike gray dress was supplanted by a lively blue robe.

She advanced smilingly to welcome the young man, whom she had known and liked from his childhood up.

"I am too happy, or almost too happy, to see you, Rodolph! But not so much surprised as you might think. There was a rumor that reached us all long ago, to the effect that you had not been killed by the Comanches, as had been reported, but that you were still living, a captive among the Indian tribes, or, as some said, in a Mexican prison."

"Both reports were true. I was for a very short time a captive among the Comanches—they having carried me from the field of the massacre in a state of unconsciousness from a blow on my head. But, though they might

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have tortured or killed me, they could not keep me long. I escaped; but in trying to make my way through the wilderness to Gen. Scott's lines, I was taken by a detachment of Mexican soldiers and thrown into a fortress, where I remained a close prisoner until the end of the war—upon what pretext the demon only knows; I don't. As soon as I was free I hurried home. *Voila tout!*" said Rodolph, as he held her offered hand and pressed it.

"Oh! if you had only come six months sooner!" exclaimed Mrs. Tom, in the warmth of her heart, as she returned his hand's pressure; "if you had only come before Erma sailed! She never heard the rumor of your being still alive. We all kept it from her, intending to do so until the rumor should be confirmed; for we knew the suspense would be more than she could bear."

"You were right, Beth."

"But, you see, she believed herself to be a widow, poor thing, and went away to foreign lands with her father!"

Rodolph groaned, but did not contradict the speaker. Where would have been the use?

"It was such a pity! However, all you have to do now is to follow her."

"Yes—I do suppose so," agreed Rodolph, with a deep sigh.

"Yet, do you know, Rodolph, that, although she never heard that rumor of your continued life, she seemed to have a presentiment that you would return some day," said Mrs. Tom.

"Ah! Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Wolfsohn, with eager interest.

"Yes, indeed! for she, on tne last day but one before her departure, took me into her chamber and confided to me more of her private history than had yet been discovered, even by the arrival of her father, Mr. Otho Herne. Of course, you have heard all about that. You could not have been in this neighborhood twenty-four hours without having heard of that."

"Oh, yes, I have heard all—that is, all that the public knows. Erma told you more, you say. What did she tell you?" anxiously inquired Mr. Wolfsohn.

"You shall know in due time. After putting me in

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possession of some of the hidden secrets of her blameless life, she said:

"'I have a sure conviction that my husband is not dead. I know that he is alive. Do not ask me how I know this, for I cannot tell you. But—if he should return to this neighborhood, give him this letter, and after he has read it, tell him all that I have told you, and answer any questions he may ask you.'"

"A letter! From Erma to me! Give it me! Oh! give it me!" exclaimed Wolfsohn, with impatient eagerness.

"Here it is. I took it from my locked cabinet, where I had put it away securely, and brought it down to you as soon as I heard that you were in the house," said Mrs. Tom, as she placed the letter in his hands.

"You'll pardon my rudeness," said the impatient husband, as he tore open the envelope to devour the contents of poor Erma's letter. It was pathetically short, and without date or greeting, and as follows:

"I will be brief, for you may not have patience to read many words from me. I refer you to Mrs. Thomas Morset for the whole story of my most innocent yet most unhappy life; that now, at last, I am free to disclose. The mysterious box that so excited your suspicion is deposited in a locked cupboard in the northwest chamber of the attic. It has never been opened since our wedding day. You may open it alone or in her presence. For the rest, Mr. Wolfsohn, if ever you should become convinced that your wife is pure, and your child your own, and should desire to be reconciled with both, I have but one word to say—Come to us."

He pressed the letter to his lips, and put it in his bosom with a half-pleased, half-disappointed air—being pleased with the letter, but disappointed in its brevity, and, yes, in its coldness.

He hungered for page after page of affectionate breathings.

Yet he could not but admit that, in very self-respect, his cruelly repudiated wife could not have written more warmly or more lengthily.

"Will you let me see that box, Beth?" he inquired.

"Certainly," she answered, rising. "Come with me."

She led him from the room.

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As they crossed the hall she spoke to Aquilo, who was in waiting there, and said:

"Bring up a large screw-driver, a hammer and a hatchet to the attic immediately. We may need them all, for the box is strong," she added, to Mr. Wolfsohn, as she signaled him to precede her up the stairs.

They reached the attic room where the cupboard was that contained the box.

Then Mrs. Tom took a bunch of keys from her pocket and unlocked the door.

By this time Aquilo, with the tools, joined them.

"Lift out that box, and lay it in the middle of the floor," said the lady.

The boy obeyed, and the "mysterious" box lay at the feet of Rodolph Wolfsohn.

It was a large box, about three feet long by two broad, and one foot deep.

"Shall Aquilo open it?" inquired Mrs. Tom.

"He may draw the screws and then go," answered Rodolph, breathlessly.

Aquilo, with some difficulty, drew screw after screw, and when he had drawn the last he gathered his tools together and left the room.

Rodolph Wolfsohn knelt down beside the box and removed the cover.

"Shall I withdraw? Speak plainly, without hesitation, if you wish me to do so," said Mrs. Tom, betraying, however, in her look, her evident wish to remain and see the contents of that strange box.

"No, don't go. Stay where you are," said Mr. Wolfsohn, who had lifted off and laid aside the top of the box, and was now taking out straw, coarse paper, fine paper and linen.

When the last was lifted he stooped and looked into the bottom of the box, and saw what seemed to be a dark oil painting, without a frame. It was not quite so large as the bottom of the box.

He put his hands down, slipping his fingers under the top and bottom of the picture and raised it to the light.

At the same moment Beth Morset drew near. Both looked at it together and uttered a simultaneous exclamation of dismay and horror.

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It was a compartment picture, or rather two pictures, painted on one canvas in this manner. A line was drawn down the middle of the canvas dividing it equally into two halves. On each half was painted a picture.

On the left half was represented a prison cell with stone walls, grated window and rude bench. On the bench sat a delicate, refined-looking man of middle-age, with an expression of utter despair on his face, and fetters on his hands and feet. The only sunny spot in the dark scene was the light from a second window, but this light cast upon the stone floor at the feet of the man the shadow of the gallows!

On the right of this picture was quite another scene of misery—a darkened chamber, a crimson curtained bedstead, with the curtains looped high to show the weight that lay upon it—a very sad weight! A dead mother, with a dead infant on her breast—the mother the very express image of Erma Wolfsohn herself!

"In the name of Heaven, what is this? What means this? Who are these?" exclaimed Rodolph Wolfsohn, almost transfixed with horror and pity.

"Her parents—Erma's parents!" solemnly replied Beth Morset.

"Explain!" breather Rodolph Wolfsohn, sinking into a chair that stood at hand.

"If you have heard, as I presume you have, all the particulars of Otho Herne's trial for the murder of Gustave Perlemonte, ending in the conviction of the accused, you may understand the subject of the pictures. On the one hand is the prisoner Otho Herne, in the condemned cell, with the shadow of the gallows on the floor at his feet. The likeness is perfect, for I have seen Otho Herne frequently. On the other side is the picture of Mary Herne, the wife of Otho, as she lay dead with the corpse of her infant on her bosom. The terrible excitement of her husband's trial and condemnation brought on an illness that ended in a premature confinement, with the death of both mother and babe."

"Great Heaven, what a tragedy! And the likeness of that mother to Erma! It might have been taken for Erma's self!" said Rodolph, with emotion.

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"Yes; but the mother was young—but thirty-three when she died. Erma was her living image."

"Who could have had the barbarity to send her such a present on her wedding day?" demanded Roldolph Wolfsohn, with difficulty suppressing stronger language.

"Listen," said Beth Morset. "Erma told me that her dear father, ever benevolent, when she was sixteen years of age, employed a struggling young artist, named Stukely, to paint her portrait and the portraits of her parents. This artist executed his work well enough; but in the process formed a strong attachment to his more youthful subject."

"The presumptuous scoundrel!" jealously exclaimed Wolfsohn.

"He pressed his suit with Erma, who never encouraged, but always repulsed it. He followed her wherever she went, to her great annoyance."

"Some one ought to have clapped him into a lunatic asylum!" burst forth Rodolph Wolfsohn.

Beth Morset went on, regardless of his interruptions.

"He was on the steamer with Erma and her father at the time of the supposed murder of Gustave Perlemonte. He was one of the two or three men on the deck at the fatal moment. He happened to be nearest the scene of action, and saw Otho Herne pitch Gustave Perlemonte into the sea. He was the principal—in fact, he was the only convicting witness for the prosecution. He withdrew, however, said nothing of what he had seen, when the other few men who were on deck rushed to the scene of action, and saw one man standing where two had lately stood. But, after the arrest of Otho Herne, what do you think this half-crazy suitor did?"

"Some atrocity, no doubt!" exclaimed Rodolph Wolfsohn, indignantly.

"He sought an interview with the prisoner in his cell, told him of what he had seen, and offered to suppress his testimony if Otho Herne would give him the hand of his daughter!"

"And what did the father reply?" eagerly demanded Rodolph Wolfsohn.

"That he would die, and see his daughter dead, before he would consent to such a sacrifice!"

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"And then? What then?" demanded Rodolph.

"The half-mad lover went to Erme herself."

"And she?"

"Told him that she belonged not to herself, but to her dear father, to be disposed of as that father pleased! That she would seek him and find out his will, and abide by it."

"And then?"

"She did visit her father in his cell. She laid the case before him, and placed herself at his disposal."

"And the father?" breathlessly questioned Rodolph.

"The father asked the daughter whether she had any liking for this suitor. The daughter's looks betrayed the truth that she had no feeling but repulsion toward him, yet her words declared that she would marry him willingly to save her father's life!"

"Well? Well?"

"Then the father said to her what he had arleady said to Stukely—that he would rather die, and see his motherless daughter dead, than consent to such a sacrifice."

"Yes! And——"

"The lover was mad! That is the only excuse I can find for him. Frantic with love and vengeance, he appeared upon the trial as a witness for the prosecution. His sole testimony, most atrociously exaggerated, sealed the fate of Otho Herne! He was convicted of murder in the first degree, and condemned to death!"

"I know it! I remember the trial! Little did I think, however, that I would become personally interested in its details! Go on!"

"Erma had seen and conversed with her father's counsel. She had told them of the infamous proposal of Stukely, the chief witness for the prosecution. Upon this information they moved for a new trial."

"I remember there was a new trial."

"Yes, and the result was different. The verdict was not murder, but manslaughter, and Otho Herne was condemned to imprisonment with hard labor for life!"

"Yes, I remember all that; but little did I think he was the father of my Erma!"

"After that sentence the crazy lover still pursued Erma,

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and threatened to pursue her and denounce her to the uttermost ends of the earth if she would not be his wife!"

"The infernal villain!" burst from the lips of Rodolph.

"Bishop Whiting, being told of this by Erma, took extra precautions with her. He procured an engagement for her as a governess in Mrs. Fleetwood's family at Brighthome, and sent her there under her two middle names, instead of under her full name. Yet poor Erma always dreaded the pursuit and persecution of this mad lover, and particularly his threatened denunciation of her imprisoned father. Erma was extremely sensitive on this score. Her father was imprisoned and disgraced. But she could not bear that this fact should be known."

"Poor, poor girl!" sighed Rodolph.

"You may judge, then, her horror when, on her wedding morn, she received and opened that box, expecting to find a wedding present, and found—that horrible picture!"

"Horrible, indeed! But how could the wretch have procured the likenesses of persons and the facsimiles of scenes for his atrocious work?"

"Erma thinks from memory and from photographs in his possession; and then, you know, or you don't know, that he did visit the prisoner in his cell, and he might have gone through the house and seen Mrs. Herne's bedchamber, when it was thrown open to visitors on the day of the sale."

"That might have been; but when his diabolical picture was completed how did he know where to send it with any certainty of its reaching Erma?"

"Oh, he knew well enough! He sent it to the care of Bishop Whiting, and the worthy bishop, thinking it was a wedding present from some of Erma's friends, forwarded it to her address at Brighthome."

"The vindictive wretch!"

"What shall we do with this picture—destroy it, or screw it down in the box again?" inquired Beth Morset.

"What did Erma say in regard to its disposition?"

"She left it to your own disposal."

"Well, we will screw it down in the box again. I feel averse to burning it, bad as it is—bad in one sense, I mean. It is a fine picture otherwise. The madman was

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an artist. The face of that prisoner is very grand—yes, sublime in its sorrow, as the face of a Christian martyr. And the faces of that mother and bade are beautiful exceedingly!—beautiful as a sleeping madonna and child! No, we cannot destroy the picture, Beth," concluded Rodolph.

So he replaced the picture, and covered it with its various packings, and set the top on the box, and then recalled Aquilo with his tools to screw it up.

When they had returned to the parlor and seated themselves for a *tête-à-tête,* Beth Morset said to Rodolph:

"Erma bade me give you, should you ever return, a full and complete narrative of her life here, from the time of your departure for the Mexican war up to the time of her leaving for Europe. Are you ready to hear the story now, or will you wait for some other time?"

"I will hear it now," said Wolfsohn eagerly; for though he had heard the whole history from Lawyer Drummond and from Miss Barbra Gunn both, he hungered to hear it again from Mrs. Tom Morset, who might, he thought, give some details that had been omitted by the others, and every morsel of intelligence in regard to Erma was now far more precious than sands of gold in Rodolph's eyes.

So Beth Morset began and told the whole story over again, omitting nothing of importance, except the terrible interview between Erma and her husband on the occasion of Rodolph's secret flying visit to Brighthome, of which Beth knew nothing at all.

Many, many questions did Rodolph ask; and Mrs. Beth answered, with more or less satisfaction, as many as she could.

When the conversation ended, Rodolph arose to take leave.

Beth Morset entreated him to stay to dinner, but he begged to be excused.

"I am as restless as the Wandering Jew, dear Beth! I cannot stay anywhere! I must on and on! Good-by!" he said, offering his hand.

"But you will come and see me soon?" she inquired, with interest.

"Oh, yes, yes!" he answered, heartily shaking her hand.

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Then he went out and, without troubling a boy, walked down to the stables and got his horse.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PHANTOM OF THE STORM.

From cloud to cloud the rending lightnings rage,
Till, in the furious elemental war
Dissolved, the whole precipitated mass
Unbroken floods and solid torrents pour.
—THOMSON'S SEASONS.

A horrid spectre rises on my sight,
Before our eyes, and plain and palpable,
In all good seeming and clear circumstance
As man meets man. —JOANNA BAILLIE.

Rodolph Wolfsohn rode on toward his own house at Darkwood.

It was at yet early in the afternoon, and the air was intensely hot, close and sultry, foreboding, a thunder-storm later.

As he entered his own grounds, no familiar form of human being met his eyes. He missed old faces—though, having heard all that had befallen since he left the neighborhood, he did not expect to see them.

He knew that Gustave Perlemonte had sold the last slave off the plantation, even down to poor old Septimus and Minty, whose age not only depreciated their value, but should have exempted them from service. He knew that Clement Gladden, in the kindness of his heart, had purchased these old persons, and by his last will had left them free and well provided for, but that their affectionate hearts had prompted them to follow Erma Wolfsohn and her father into foreign countries, in the easy service of valet and maid to that very quiet and indulgent master and mistress.

So Rodolph did not expect to see them, or any servant he had ever seen before.

The home of his ancestors looked very desolate to him as he rode up to the front door.

A strange boy—one of the late master's hirelings, still kept on the place—ran forward to take his horse.

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"Has Mr. Drummond arrived?" he inquired of this youth.

"Yes, sir; he has been waiting for you almos' a 'our," said the boy, as he opened the front door from the outside and admitted Mr. Wolfsohn.

Drummond, hearing the arrival, stepped out from that little, dingy parlor on the left of the passage which must be so familiar to our readers as the scene of many of the most serious incidents in this family history.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Bob," said Rodolph, as he held out his hand to the young attorney.

"Don't mention it, old fellow! You must have had a good many people to see, and a great deal to talk about. And my time, just now, between terms, is not very valuable," responded Drummond, heartily, as they both entered the parlor.

How changed that room was since we last saw it! It had always looked dingy from the dark oak panelings and the faded yellow moreen curtains and furniture covers; but it had always been scrupulously clean and pervaded with the refreshing fragrance of aromatic dried herbs in the winter, and of flowers in their season during spring, summer and autumn.

Now the room was foul with dust, ashes and tobacco stains, and the air filled with the fumes of stale beer, stale pipes, cigars and all the odious scents of drunkenness and dissipation, for this had evidently been the scene of Gustave Perlemonte's nightly orgies with his disreputable companions.

The two men sat down to the little round center table where once lay the family daguerreotypes and old gift books so well known to us all, but missing now.

The table was covered with papers, which Rodolph Wolfsohn and Lawyer Drummond proceeded to examine together.

They were all documents relating to the estate, and of no special interest to our readers. They occupied the pair of friends for some hours, until the pangs of hunger began to be felt by both, who had forgotten to order dinner.

Wolfsohn then rang the bell and called the fat black cook to his presence. Her name was Letty, and she also

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was a stranger to the plantation, one of the late Gustave Perlemonte's hirelings, who was kept on to abide the will of the heir.

Rodolph told her to prepare a meal of something that could be got up in the shortest possible time.

The woman went out and bestirred herself to such effect that within twenty minutes the two men were called to the dining room to sit down at a table provided with very appetizing food for very famished stomachs—rashers of ham, grilled, fresh eggs poached, buttered toast and fine fresh lettuce, fragrant coffee and rich cream and butter.

After the friends had eaten heartily, they returned to their work in the parlor, where they continued so absorbed that they were oblivious to the darkening day and the rising storm, until the light failed them, and they were obliged to stop until Rodolph rang for candles.

Then, for the first time, they observed the black, overclouded sky, and heard the distant mutterings of the approaching tempest.

Old Letty brought in a lamp and set it on the table, and then went to close the open windows, into which the lightning was now occasionally flashing.

Having done this, she retired from the room, leaving the two gentlemen to their occupation.

They recommenced work by the light of the lamp, but could not pursue it long.

The storm came on apace. The lightning blazed incessantly through the one window on the side of the room whose shutters had been broken off during the reign of Gustave Perlemonte, and were not yet replaced. The thunder broke like thousands of exploding bombshells over the house. In the blinding and deafening war of the elements it was impossible to work.

Rodolph Wolfsohn and Lawyer Drummond pushed aside their papers and drew back their chairs from the empty, open, blackened fireplace that yawned like the mouth of an extinct volcano.

They sat near the middle of the room in silence, except when a momentary pause in the din of elemental battle permitted them to speak and be heard.

Still the lightning blazed—blaze upon blaze—the thun-

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der rolled crash after crash, the wind raved and roared, and the rain poured down as if the "windows of heaven" had been opened for another deluge, and all this amid the sound of falling buildings and rending forests.

The two men, watching there in the dingy parlor, almost trembled for the safety of the strong, stone house in which they sat. For this did not seem an ordinary thunderstorm, but the final breaking up and destruction of all material things.

In the midst of this awful conflict of nature, the negro servants attached to the house crept in, one by one, and crouched about in the corners of the parlor with the childish feeling that they would be so much safer with the white men.

Neither Rodolph Wolfsohn nor Lawyer Drummond rebuked their intrusion by a single word or look; they were, in truth, themselves overawed by the unprecedented, even sublime, fury of the elements.

The storm increased in violence until there was not an instant's pause in the flashing of the lightning, the crashing of the thunder, the howling of the wind, the pouring of the rain, the tumbling of walls, and the tearing of woods.

Hour after hour this horrible and devastating storm continued, until at length the watchers in the parlor began to feel as if it would never cease while a building or a tree was left standing.

Yet toward midnight the fury of the elements began to subside, but so gradually that its decline could scarcely at first be perceived. The lightning flashed less vividly, the thunder pealed less loudly, the wind sank to a moan, and, above all, now could be heard the steady falling of the rain. In another half hour the lightning and thunder had ceased, the wind had gone down, and nothing now could be heard but the gentle descent of the "clearing-up shower"—music to the ears of the terrified negroes crouching in the parlor.

"Well, the storm is over, my good people. I fancy you may all retire now," said Mr. Wolfsohn, rousing himself from his reclining position in the big armchair.

The servants got up from their recumbent positions and crept out of the room.

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"I think you will have to take a bed here to-night, Drummond," said Rodolph.

"I know I shall. The roads will be impassable for horses."

"I shall be very glad of your company in this desolate house. 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.' But yet I do hope that Bab will not be uneasy at your absence."

"Bab? No, indeed! She is the lightest-hearted, most careless and fearless little creature alive. Besides, I told her that I should be late, and she will know now that the storm has kept me."

"She has a happy disposition."

"Very."

The friends' amiable conversation was here interrupted in a violent manner.

Hurried footsteps, as of many people, were heard rushing toward the parlor accompanied by cries of:

"Thunder Debbil! Thunder Debbil!"

"That nuisance still extant!" cried Rodolph Wolfsohn, starting to his feet, just as the parlor door was burst open and the terrified crowd of negroes rushed in with discordant cries of:

"Thunder Debbil!"

"Beat down de old barn to de groun'!"

"Thundred Debbil!"

"Dancin' on de ruins!" etc.

"Silence! every one of you lunatics!" exclaimed Rodolph Wolfsohn, who had gone to his coat, which was hanging on a chair, and had taken from its pocket a small, six-barreled revolver.

The hubbub among the servants subsided at the mandate of their master.

"Where is this practical joker, this Thunder Devil?" inquired Mr. Wolfsohn, as soon as order was restored.

Half a dozen vehement voices answered in a breath:

"Dancin' on de ruff ob de ole barn, wot he dundered down to de werry groun'!"

"Dancin' on de ruins ob de ole——"

"Out dere leapin' up an' down ober de pile ob de——"

"Jumpin' an' caperin' on de fallen ruff ob——"

"Dancin' on de litter ob de——"

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"Dancin'——"

"Silence! What a din! You are worse than the thunderstorm! Are you going to be quiet, now?"

A dead pause followed the master's question.

"Now, then, follow me, noiselessly. Be as still as mice. No! You must not bring a light—seeing one of the negroes take up the lamp—we must be dark and still. I will put a stop this night to the capers of that dancing devil!" said Rodolph Wolfsohn, as he led the way to the back premises where the barn had once stood. He was accompanied by Lawyer Drummond and closely followed by the frightened negroes.

He closed all the doors of the rooms on each side of the hall, that the light might not shine out and betray their presence to the "enemy" while reconnoitering.

Then, in the dark, he went and opened the back door and looked out.

The barn, facing the back of the house, was in ruins on the ground. It had evidently been blown down by the storm. And there, leaping and dancing about among the débris, was a tall, dark, half-naked figure.

Rodolph Wolfsohn had never seen the "Thunder Devil" before, and had never believed in its existence until tonight. He had always held it to be a delusion of the darkies, imposed upon the credulity of his wife and others. Now he saw that it was a substantial form, indeed, and a very athletic one.

Unsuspected by the performer, he gazed for a few moments, and then shouted from the dark doorway:

"Halt, there!"

The dancing devil started with astonishment, and turned as if he would have fled, but was instantly arrested by a shout from Mr. Wolfsohn:

"Stand! or I shoot you dead!"

The dark figure stood stock still.

Rodolph Wolfsohn stepped out of doors, still accompanied by Lawyer Drummond, and crossed the back yard toward the ruins of the barn, keeping his eyes steadily fixed upon the "Thunder Devil," who, however, made no second attempt to run away.

"Now walk before us into the house," said Rodolph Wolfsohn, as soon as he had reached the ruins.

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The fallen potentate stepped down from the pile of broken timbers, bricks and mortar, and walked on in advance of his captors.

The crowd of negroes at the door scattered and fled in all directions. He was a captive, but he was a devil, all the same, and to be greatly feared.

Mr. Wolfsohn and Lawyer Drummond marched him into the passage, and then Rodolph stepped forward and opened the parlor door, and they marched him into the room and into the full lamplight, where he stood clearly revealed to view.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DISCOVERED.

Grim reader, did you ever see a ghost? —BYRON.

They shuddered, as no doubt the bravest cower
When they can't tell what 'tis that doth appall;
How odd a single hobgoblin's nonentity
Should cause more fear than a whole host's identity!
—BYRON.

A fine, tall, well-formed young athlete, as black and as handsome as a Caffre and with almost as little clothing on him; he stood there, erect, dumb and dignified, as any captive Sioux warrior.

For a moment not a word was spoken between the three occupants of the parlor.

Rodolph Wolfsohn and Lawyer Drummond had both recognized him as a free negro, occupying a log cottage on the Darkwood plantation, and getting his living as an agricultural laborer on the neighboring farms, where slave hands were short.

He was rather a superior person of his class, and had been brought up on the estate of Gen. Albemarle Montgomery, who, on dying, had set him free. He had picked up a little education, somehow, among his young masters and mistresses, and he bore an excellent character for intelligence, industry and honesty. He was a member, and an elder, in the colored people's Methodist church, and a fairly good preacher and exhorter.

His real name was Abel Gales; but for his gigantic

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stature he had been nicknamed, and was now most commonly called Goliath.

To find him in such a position was truly a great and painful surprise to the young master of Darkwood.

After a minute's stern gaze, which the captive bore with most unflinching firmness, Mr. Wolfsohn spoke in severe tones:

"You, Goliath! I am very much astonished!"

"Why so, Master Rodolph? What harm have I done?" inquired the man, composedly.

"What harm, indeed? You have kept a lot of poor, ignorant and deluded colored people in a state of chronic dread and spasmodic terror for the last three or four years! So that they had more superstitious horror of the 'Thunder Devil' than natural horror of the worst thunderstorm that ever raged."

"Such was not my intention, Master Rodolph," replied the man.

"I should never have suspected one of your grave religious character and superior training of such antic tricks."

"They were not tricks, Master Rodolph."

"What were they, then, I should like to know?" demanded Mr. Wolfsohn, still speaking very sternly.

"Shower baths, sir," quietly replied Goliath.

"'Shower baths,' man? What do you mean?"

"You white gentlemen have your shower baths inside of your own house, from water tanks on the roof, and you take them in privacy and comfort, and you feel the good of them; but I, a poor colored man, who has learned enough to know the duty of keeping clean and strong, have no water tanks on my little low roof and can have no shower bath unless I take it out of doors as it comes straight down from the heavens. So I take it that way."

"And that was the best way. You had the advantage of us indoor bathers there, Goliath," put in Lawyer Drummond.

"Yes, Master Robert, I think I had, sir."

"But why could not you have enjoyed your shower baths in the open air, without frightening your poor fellow-creatures out of their senses? They the men and women of your own religious charge, too!—the people

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whom you profess to teach and guide on their way to a better world!" severely demanded Mr. Wolfsohn.

"Master Rodolph, I never intended to frighten anybody. Indeed, I did not, sir. Not at first! The way it came about was this: I could not take my shower bath decently unless I came out in the night, when there happened to be a storm and everybody else was indoors. And then I used to climb to the top of some barn or outhouse, and let the pure and gracious rain fall down upon me from the clouds!"

"It is a wonder you were not afraid of the thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Mr. Drummond.

"Oh, Master Robert, I loved the thunder, and the lightning, and the storm! I loved the grand music of the thunder and the splendor of the lightning and the glory of the storm! The god of battles riding on the tempest! It excited, it exalted, it enraptured me! I could not help but dance, and leap, and shout for joy, as I stood upon the housetop and took my shower bath in the storm!" exclaimed the man, kindling with enthusiasm.

"Come, Goliath! you are working yourself up into a camp-meeting ecstasy," said Mr. Wolfsohn.

"I beg your pardon, Master Rodolph; I forgot myself. Well, sir, it happened one night that an old colored man —Uncle Septimus—was belated in coming home from an errand and was caught in the storm. He saw me enjoying my dancing shower bath amidst thunder and lightning, and he mistook me for a devil and ran away, howling with terror. I jumped down and ran after him, but he reached the kitchen and clapped the door to before I could overtake him! After that I was seen by others, so that the report of the 'Thunder Devil' got abroad."

"Why did you not explain to your friends that you were the Thunder Devil?" demanded Rodolph Wolfsohn.

"Master, I will tell you why. I soon found out that their fear of the Thunder Devil was a more certain means of grace to my people than their love of their preacher. My people, like all other colored Christians, are fervent in faith, but weak in works. I hardly see, Master Rodolph, except in one or two cases out of a hundred, that their professions of religion make any difference in their practice of daily duty. They believe that they will be

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saved by faith, no matter what they do! They have no fear of the Lord whatever, but they have a grand terror of the devil! Surely, Master Robert, you know that?"

"Yes, I do, to my cost!" laughed Mr. Drummond. "The most incurable sheep stealers that it has ever been my duty to prosecute have been members of your flock, Goliath."

"Just so, Master Robert. But haven't you noticed that for the last three years sheep stealing and hen-roost robbing have greatly diminished in these parts?"

"Now you speak of it, I think it is really so," said the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, and owing to the negroes' wholesome fear of being carried off in their sins by the Thunder Devil."

"Well, Goliath, you had better go and get your clothes —I hope you left them in some dry spot."

"Yes, Master Rodolph."

"Dress yourself and return home. I will not divulge your secret and impair your usefulness among your people; but mind this, I will refrain only upon one condition —that you will henceforth take your shower baths in some solitary place where there will be no possibility of your being seen to frighten anybody," said Mr. Wolfsohn, emphatically.

"I promise you, Master Rodolph, and I thank you. I can go, now, sir?"

"Certainly."

"But—excuse me, Master Rodolph—is there any danger of my being seen by any of your servants?"

"Oh, dear, no! They have all fled to their quarters and —hidden themselves under their beds, no doubt!" answered Mr. Wolfsohn.

Then the man bowed and left the room.

Lawyer Drummond followed him down the hall, and barred the back door after him.

"That is a queer case," said Drummond, as he returned to the room.

"Yes. I am glad, however, that the mystery of the Thunder Devil is unravelled. Now, I suppose, Drummond, we will have to find our way to our own quarters and wait upon ourselves since all our retinue have fled,"

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said Mr. Wolfsohn, as he took up the lamp and led the way upstairs.

Luckily, old Letty had anticipated the night's guests, and had prepared two rooms as well as circumstances would permit, for their accommodation.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when the friends retired to bed, and then, being very much fatigued, they immediately fell asleep, and slept soundly until the risen sun shining through the uncurtained windows awoke them both.

They met at an early breakfast, which did the cook credit, and which they enjoyed despite of all drawbacks.

An hour's work after breakfast set all the documents in order, and then Lawyer Drummond took leave of his client.

Rodolph Wolfsohn, after seeing his friend mount and ride away, returned to the dingy parlor and sat down in a state of melancholy and depression.

He had written and sent off his impulsive letter to Erma, inclosed in one to her London bankers, and he knew a whole month, at least, must elapse before he could hope to hear any news of her, even from London, and that a much longer and more indefinite period must pass before he could expect to hear from Erma's self.

A feeling of the utmost impatience came over him. He felt that he could not wait in inactivity at home for the slow-going and coming of the ocean mails, but that he must rise and hurry after his own letter, see Erma's London bankers in person, find out the first point of her journey East, follow her thither—to Constantinople, Cairo, Jerusalem—wherever she might be. He felt that even such following would be too slow for his eager spirit.

He could echo the words of the Psalmist, and pray for the "wings of the dove."

He quickly resolved to sacrifice the home of his ancestors—to sell Darkwood to raise the necessary funds to bear the expense of his quest, which he knew might be a long one.

He acted immediately on this resolution, and turning around to the table on which the writing materials still remained, he drew up an advertisement of Darkwood for sale.

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It cost him many a pang to do this, but he must find Erma, and to find her he must have a large sum of money to defray expenses in going in search of her.

When he had completed his task, every penstroke of which was a self-inflicted stab to his own spirit, he rang the bell and summoned the servant who had acted as messenger during Gustave Perlemonte's domestic administration.

When Mr. Wolfsohn contemplated the low brow, flat nose, thick lips, and generally stupid expression of this unmitigated son of Africa, who was the successor of the bright, intelligent old Septimus, he shook his head, and saw that he must write his instructions to the printer instead of sending them verbally.

So he told Brutus to saddle a horse, and get himself ready to take letters to Ice Cliff.

While the man was gone upon this preparatory errand, Rodolph Wolfsohn wrote a letter to the editor and proprietor of the Ice Cliff *Courier,* with a request that he would insert the accompanying advertisement in his valuable paper, and keep it standing until further notice, and that he would also cause to be printed posters of the same to be put up in all conspicuous public places.

By the time the messenger reported himself ready, Mr. Wolfsohn had the envelope closed and directed, and he gave it to the man, with the simple, plain order to take it to the newspaper office in Ice Cliff.

As there was but one such place in the village, no possible mistake could be made, even by the most stupid errand boy.

Many times in the course of this family history we have had occasion to record instances of the warm, neighborly love that prevailed among the people of this vicinity.

Rodolph Wolfsohn had fresh evidence that this spirit had not died out.

On this second day of his sojourn at Darkwood he had a succession of visitors coming with welcomes, congratulations and proffers of friendship and service; the rector of St. James', Dr. Cleveland, Gen. Bibb, Dr. Dutton, and last, but, oh! not least in brotherly love, Cousin Wally Lambe.

All these were earnest in their lamentations that Mr.

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Otho Herne, the father of Mrs. Wolfsohn, should have carried her off to foreign parts, under the impression, which everyone shared, that she was a widow of nearly two years' standing, and everyone wanted to know what Mr. Wolfsohn was going to do about it.

Rodolph told them that he intended to follow his wife as soon as possible; but he said not a word of his having advertised his ancestral home for sale. He could not bear to speak of that, and, besides, he thought it would be generally known in a day or two.

After this informal reception of his friends, he retired to rest in a more hopeful frame of mind, though still the necessity of selling Darkwood pained him scarcely less than the delay before he could meet his Erma.

In two days more the news of the intended sale spread far and wide over the neighborhood.

Friends who met Rodolph Wolfsohn in the village post office on the morning of the fourth day, expostulated and bewailed, but to no good purpose, since they could offer no remedy.

But the forced sale of an old ancestral home was always considered a great calamity in that region, as elsewhere. The only effect of his neighbors' condolence was to send Rodolph Wolfsohn home to Darkwood in a very despondent frame of mind.

He found Cousin Wally Lambe waiting for him in the little dingy parlor.

Cousin Wally's innocent old baby face was brimful of sympathy and benevolence as he arose from the old flag-bottomed chair and reached out his chubby old baby hand to greet his host.

"Now, what's all this nonsense about selling Darkwood, Rodolph? Why must you sell it?" he inquired, as soon as they had exchanged salutations and were seated.

Wolfsohn was sick and tired of fruitless conversation on this subject—so much so that he might have snubbed almost any other man who had entered upon it; but to simple, single-hearted Cousin Wally he opened his heart as he had not done to any other of his friends.

"I must sell Darkwood to raise funds to go to Europe, perhaps to Asia, or Africa, in search of my wife," he said, quietly.

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"Now, look here! Now, don't you do no such a thing, Rodolph Wolfsohn! Why should you? If you haven't got money, why, I have, and you are just as welcome to as much as you want as ever you can be! Now, there!"

"But suppose I should never be able to pay you?" inquired the young man, with a grave smile.

"I don't want to be paid!" exclaimed Cousin Wally. "No nor I don't want to offend you, neither, so you needn't fire up," he added, seeing a change come over the expressive face of the young man. "What I mean, Rodolph, is, that I—that you may take as long a time as ever you like to pay me," he added, blushing like a child.

"You are—you are—more than kind and generous," said Wolfsohn, with emotion, "and I do earnestly thank you; but you know I cannot——"

"Now, there, now! Don't say that! Why lor! why, I have got more money than I know what to do with! My railway shares do bring me in so much! It comes piling in, and piling in, and piling in on me till I get scared! I do, indeed! And I feel as if it was a sin to have so much and to keep on taking more!"

"You may give a great deal in charity and, of course, I know you do."

"To the poor people round here. Well, but it seems to me the more I give the more comes pouring in, and pouring in, till I get scared, as I said. Oh! I would be so much obliged to you if you would take some of it off of me."

"You may have a large family to provide for, Mr. Lambe."

"I don't think so! I don't, indeed! We've got two, now—Walter and Ada—and I don't think we'll have any more. We ain't young, you know. Come, now! You won't go and sell poor old Darkwood. You'll take some of that same top-heavy load of money off my conscience."

"But Mrs. Lambe might——"

"Oh, no, she mightn't. She did go it right down strong at first on velvets, and satins, and jewels, and elephant's hair or dromedary's hair, or some sort o' beast's hair shawls, that she sent to New York for! But, lor! a woman ain't got but one lifetime, and it will take her all the rest of her'n to wear out what she's got! She

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don't hanker after any more o' them vanities, 'specially when she sees nobody in the county but herself ever wears such——"

"But you may travel."

"Don't want to, neither me nor my dear Ada! She's seasick on steamboats, and nervous on the cars! No, we don't want to travel, nor we don't want a gallery of pictures nor a library of books, 'cause none of our neighbors have got 'em. And what I am to do with all that money a-pouring in on top of me, and a-weighing down my soul, I ralley don't know. Oh, do take some thousands of it off me!"

"How many thousands do you wish to get rid of?" inquired Wolfsohn, with a smile.

"As many as you can take—ten—twenty—thirty—or——"

"Less will do. And will you take a mortgage on this place for the amount, with interest?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, if you wish it though I don't care about it a bit! And I need not never foreclose it, no matter what happens," added Cousin Wally to himself, doubling all his negatives to strengthen them.

"Then I accept, with more gratitude than I know how to express, your kind offer. Indeed, Cousin Wally, you have given me a great deliverance! Even greater than you know! I was full of sorrow over the necessity of selling dear old Darkwood, my mother's cherished home and the home of our ancestors for as many generations as they have lived in this country. Indeed, great heart, I know not how to thank you!" exclaimed young Wolfsohn, full of emotion.

The sweet, old baby-blue eyes of Cousin Wally filled with tears, as he replied:

"Don't say no more. You don't know how happy I am to think Darkwood won't be sold. I—could—just—cry for joy."

And he did cry, too.

The very same day Mr. Walter Lambe and Mr. Rodolph Wolfsohn rode over to the office of Lawyer Drummond, in Ice Cliff, and the business was done. The loan was effected and its payment was secured by bond and mortgage.

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On leaving the office the two friends separated to go their several ways—Cousin Wally to his home of Lambe's Fold, and Mr. Wolfsohn to Darkwood.

On their taking leave of each other, Rodolph again, with much emotion, returned thanks to his benefactor.

"Why, lor, don't say nothing more about it. You don't know how happy I feel to-day, Rodolph. Why, I have never been so happy as I am to-day, except just two other days in my life—the first day was when I married my beloved Ada, and the second day was when I sold my old bridge to the railway company—who wanted it for its solid foundations, you know, right where they wished to carry the railroad across the river—and made my fortune. And this is—this is the third grand happy day of my life."

"May all your remaining days in this life be happy, best heart. I know all your days in the next will be so," said Rodolph.

And they parted.

As soon as Cousin Wally got home that evening he went into the kitchen and pulled his documents—his bond and mortgage—out of his pocket, and put them both into the fire, watching them until they were utterly consumed, and then saying to himself:

"There! That is all safe. And I'm glad of it; for I might die, and poor Wolfsohn mighn't be able to pay back the money, or even the interest, and then my administrators would push things to the bitter end with the poor boy, if they had them papers I burned; but now, thanks be to goodness, they can't do no such a cruel thing!"

And then Cousin Wally went to his modest, plainly furnished sitting room, where Ada was waiting tea for him.

He sat down between the pretty, white-covered and silver-glittering tea table and the open window, took up his infant boy and girl, sat one upon one fat knee and the other upon the other, and talked, and chirruped, and sang to them, until Mistress Ada declared that he was only the biggest baby of the three, and rang for the tea urn, to stop the play.

Now, let no one suppose, from the foregoing incidents that Mr. Walter Lambe was a Crœsus of wealth. He was nothing of the sort. He was not even a very rich man.

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In the large cities, and among millionaires, he would have been considered a poor one. But in the neighborhood of Ice Cliff, where no one was very rich, and no one very poor, where the habits and style of living, even among the better classes, were primitive, and plain, where there were few wants and no extravagances, where no great church debts were contracted and no expensive institutions of charity required, Cousin Wally really found that his railway shares brought him in more money than he knew what to do with, and he was, in fact, considered a great capitalist. Therefore, his benevolent heart was sincerely delighted to be able to assist Rodolph in his hour of need.

My reader, Cousin Wally was not a Narcissus in beauty, nor an Apollo in genius, but there are few men in this world who have ever been loved as well as he was.

Within ten days from his acceptance of this loan, Rodolph Wolfsohn had put Darkwood in the hands of a competent bailiff, who was directed to make all returns of accounts and moneys to Lawyer Drummond, and he had settled up all his other business, taken leave of his friends, made his final preparations, and started for New York city, whence he intended to sail for Liverpool, to pursue his search for Erma.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHERE WAS ERMA?

Since last, with spirit far from free,
She left her native strand,
She's wandered many miles at sea,
And many miles on land;
She's seen the fair realms of the earth
By rude commotion torn,
Which taught her how to prize the worth
Of that where she was born. —G. P. Morris.

We must return to the discarded wife, and give a very brief summary of her adventures since she reluctantly left Brighthome.

After having prepared the way, as well as she could, for a reconciliation with her misguided husband by leaving her letter and messages for him with Beth Morset, she

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set out on her travels, with her child and her father, and attended by their two servants.

They went by stagecoach and railroad to New York, spent one quiet day with Bishop Whiting, and on the next morning, which was the first Saturday in February, they sailed for Liverpool.

Now, thousands of men, and women, too, cross the ocean many times in the course of the year and think no more about it than "home-keeping" folk think of crossing a river.

But to Erma the first day out of sight of land, the first night, with "only a plank between herself and eternity," seemed a mystery and a wonder—half a rapture and half a horror.

The voyage was an unusually pleasant and prosperous one.

Neither Erma nor any of her party suffered from sea-sickness. Every day, well wrapped up, they sat on deck enjoying the magnificent ocean view and bracing sea air —an experience that remained, with Erma, at least, a marvel and a joy forever.

On the night of the thirteenth the steamer drew near Cape Clear Lighthouse, and on the morning of the fourteenth—St. Valentine's day—the passengers, on coming on deck, were delighted with the view of the coast of Ireland.

Erma, only ten days at sea, gazed upon the land with the ecstasy of one who had never seen land before. And she wondered at the apathy of some of her fellow passengers, the men and women to whom "custom" had made "stale" all these wonders of life and nature.

Another day and night brought them to Liverpool.

Here our party paused for about twenty-four hours to see the world-renowned docks, and other places of interest, and then, on the morning of the third day from landing, they took the express train to London.

How constantly, by day and night, that great road is passed over by thousands of indifferent travelers, who never give a thought to the great, tragic, heroic, glorious past of the country through which it runs. But to Erma the scene was so filled with historical, poetical and traditional associations that the sphere overwhelmed her into

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a trance-like state, in which the past was lived over again, and visions of its story floated before her.

Their arrival at the Euston Square Station, London, woke her up to the realization of the clearest facts of the nineteenth century.

What had the ancient moated castles and mailed warriors of the middle ages to do with railway stations and policemen in the year of steam, 18—?

Nothing whatever.

One circumstance Erma noticed and approved—that, though this station was about four times as much thronged as any of our own on this side of the ocean, there was none of that maddening confusion that attends the arrival of a train at any of our depots.

The cabs for hire were drawn up in an orderly line near the sidewalk, and it would have been as much as a cabman's personal liberty was worth to have raised a cry of:

"Cab, sir! Cab, mum!" etc.

They simply waited to be called.

Old Septimus knew his duty, and did it promptly. He called two cabs—one for his master and mistress and the child, Rodolph, and one for himself and Minty.

Mr. Herne gave the order—to Morley's Hotel, Trafalgar Square.

And the cabs drove off.

Erma never took her eyes off the houses on each side of the streets through which they passed.

"This wondróus London!" was the burden of her thought during the whole ride.

They reached their hotel in time for a late dinner, after which, being very much fatigued, they retired to bed.

On her waking in the morning, the eyes of Erma opened again upon the grand old world of the past—the world of London—the world of Old England.

She thought not of the present London and England of the nineteenth century—the merchants and artisans of the city, the belles of Belgravia, and the beaux of Bond Street! She thought of Windsor Castle, of Westminster Abbey, of the Tower of London, and of the Plantagenets, the Tudors, and the Stuarts, who had reigned and sinned or suffered there!

Our party had arrived in London in the beginning of

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the gay and fashionable season. They had brought many letters of introduction from friends in America to their friends in England, and they might have entered extensively into society had they been so disposed. But, for obvious reasons, they avoided notoriety.

The only letters of introduction that they presented were from Bishop Whiting to certain English clergymen of the Established Church, with whom the worthy prelate had made acquaintance during his own visit to England some years previous.

These letters were presented, and the usual invitations to dinner followed from the recipients.

Mr. Herne and his daughter remained in London some few weeks, during which they transacted some business with the lawyers, accepted the hospitalities of the clergy and visited all the grand old monuments of history and antiquity with which London and its vicinity abounds.

It was not until the second week in April that Mr. Herne and his daughter, with the child, Rodolph, still attended by their servants, left London by the Grand Northern Railway for Yorkshire, where his estate of Heather House was situated.

Otho Herne, an Englishman by birth, and not even a naturalized citizen of the United States, to which he had been brought by his parents in childhood, and in which he had lived, boy and man, for over half a century, found no difficulty whatever in entering upon his inheritance as next of kin, although he was a very distant kinsman, indeed, to old Henry Herne, the late master of Heather House.

As the night of her arrival at this historical home of her remote forefathers was a marked epoch in the memory of Erma Wolfsohn, I am tempted to describe it.

They had been traveling all day, steadily northward, had passed through the old cathedral towns of Peterboro and York, and still, as day declined, on northward, until, late at night, the train "slowed" into a little, obscure, remote station in the extreme north of the North Riding of Yorkshire, and stopped.

Here Mr. Herne and his daughter, with their attendants, left the train and took shelter, with their luggage, in the station master's small office. These were not the

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days of telegrams, and the letters to the steward at Heather House seemed to have miscarried. At all events, neither carriage nor cart was there to transport them to their home.

Erma was not disturbed by this *contretemps*. Everything that had happened to her since she had landed in England—though, in fact, it was all of the most commonplace character—seemed to her weird, unreal, mysterious.

Now, as she stood on the platform, in front of the little office, the night scene spread out before her seemed like the vision of a dream.

All around her rolled a vast heath, without a vestige of woodland, stretching away on the east until it was lost under the dim night horizon; on the west bounded by the far-distant, mist-crowned, ghostly heights of the Westmoreland Mountains.

Erma could have stood gazing around her, where there was so little to be seen, for hours; even the two old servants were resigned and patient, as they sat there, Septimus with his master's rugs, Minty with the sleeping child, Rodolph, on her lap; but her father was anxious and restless.

"Is there no inn near this where we could procure a carriage?" he inquired of the station master.

"Naw! Nawn but the Block Bar, ten miles awah," answered this worthy, in the broadest Yorkshire dialect.

Mr. Herne sat down on one of the rude benches and gave himself up to despair, or to what was next to it—the fate of seeing his weary daughter and himself sit up all night in a dreary little station without refreshments or comforts of any description.

But just then the welcome sounds of wheels were heard, and a carriage and a cart, driven by servants sent by the steward of Heather House, drew up before the station.

Never was a more welcome arrival.

Mr. Herne went out to meet the men who were full of respectful apologies for being later than the train—all delivered in such broad Yorkshire as to be almost unintelligible to Mr. Herne and his daughter, and which my pen shrinks from trying to put into writing.

Otho Herne stopped the talk by ordering the two men

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to put the luggage into the cart, and their own two servants to get in and sit upon it; while he himself helped his daughter into the carriage, placed the child in her arms, seated himself beside her and told the coachman to drive home.

Their road lay over the same rolling heath that Erma had gazed upon with such mystic interest from the platform of the railway station, and eastward toward the dim, distant horizon under which it disappeared.

Herne lay back in his seat and went to sleep.

Erma looked out of the window on her left, but could see nothing but the clouded night sky overhead, and the dim, boundless heath stretching out like a sea underneath.

It was a long drive, without any visible landmarks to vary the scene—no sight but the dark heath under the dim night sky, no sound but the muffled creak of the cart wheels behind the carriage.

In spite of the weird fascination which such a scene and hour had for Erma, she also lost consciousness in slumber sometimes, or started up to find herself dozing.

After a longer sleep than usual, she roused herself and put her head out of the window. She found, then, that they were approaching a dark mass of shadows in the east that arose against the horizon, and that seemed to be hills or woods, she could not tell which in the darkness.

Mr. Herne still slept heavily.

Erma closed the window, drew her shawl around her and sat back among her cushions, for the air was keen at midnight on these northern moors, although the month was April.

Being very tired by this time, Erma again composed herself to sleep, and slept until the sudden pulling up of the carriage waked both her father and herself.

The coachman got down and opened the door.

"Here we are, my dear Erma," said Mr. Herne, as he got out, took little Rodolph and laid him sleeping over one shoulder, and assisted his daughter to alight.

She looked around her and stared.

The scene was no longer the heath under the night sky, but an extensive, well-wooded park, in the midst of which stood a huge, oblong, gray stone building, flanked by two

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towers at each end, and the whole inclosed in a strong stone wall, having a heavy iron gate in the midst, and a deep moat around it.

The moat was crossed by a stout oaken bridge that led through the iron gate and to a paved walk and by a short flight of broad stone steps to the heavy, iron-bound oaken doors of the house.

"Why, it is a fortress!" exclaimed Erma, as she stood on the threshold of their old ancestral home.

"It is a very ancient stronghold, I have heard," replied her father.

In answer to his resounding knock a man servant opened the door and bowed low before the new master and mistress.

A tall, raw-boned, gray-haired, simple peasant, he seemed, rather than a civilized family servant. He was dressed in brown, homespun jacket and short breeches, with a red waistcoat and red stockings.

Father and daughter entered at once into a vast, gloomy stone hall, lighted by a great iron lamp, hanging by a long iron chain from the ceiling.

A broad staircase arose from the center of this hall. Two yawning chimneys, with open fires of wood and coal, stood facing each other on opposite sides. On the right and left of these chimneys were heavy oaken doors, leading into the various rooms.

The old servant in the red stockings and gray head opened the first door on the left, and showed the gentleman and lady into a large, lofty room, with unpapered stone walls, uncarpeted oak floor and uncurtained, small, diamond-paned windows.

"It is a prison!" exclaimed Erma, shivering.

"Sit near the fire," said her father, drawing a great, leather-covered armchair to the hearth, where blazed a hot fire composed of large knots of pine wood and large lumps of bituminous coal.

She dropped into the chair, and took her sleeping child in her arms.

"The laist master took his meals here," said the old servant. "The chimney in th' dining ha' is brokent, and the swallows ha' built their neists intil it."

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"Very well; get us something here," said Mr. Herne, impatiently, for he was hungry and tired.

The man nodded, and turned to go.

"Stay—send one of the women of the house to attend upon my daughter," said Mr. Herne, interrupting him.

"Woman, is it, your 'anner? There's not a jaud of a woman aboot the pleece! T' owld maister couldn't abide the cattle—no more could I," said the man, shortly.

Otho Herne remembered to have heard that the late master of Heather House had been an eccentric old bachelor; but he had not supposed that his eccentricities went so far as the banishment of all the female sex from his premises.

"Where are our own servants?" inquired Mr. Herne.

"Will y'anner be meaning t' barbarians?" inquired the man, alluding to our Christian and civilized darkies, Septimus and Araminta.

"Yes, t' barbarians," answered Mr. Herne, with a smile.

"In t' stable, wi' t'other beasts, where we drapit 'em out t' cart."

"Go and bring them both in to me," said Otho Herne, sternly. "The idea of putting those excellent creatures into a stable!"

The man hurried away, and in a few minutes brought Septimus and Minty into the presence of their master and mistress.

"Now, go and show this woman up into the best bedroom, if there be any good one in the house, and take this lady's luggage up, so that she may be made comfortable. Is there a fire in the room?"

"Ou, ay! A fire in baith your rooms, no to spake of water and towels and a' ye'll want," said the man.

"I will go up now with them, father, if you please," said Erma, rising, and gathering her child to her bosom.

Old Sawney led the lady and her attendant up the broad oak staircase to the rooms above and into a vast, gloomy chamber, with small, diamond-paned casement windows, a great, yawning fireplace and a tall, heavy, four-posted bedstead. These were the first objects Erma beheld, but as she grew accustomed to the obscure light in the remote corners, she saw high, old oak presses, and

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chests of drawers topped by tall mirrors, and straight-backed oaken chairs.

A thick, dark nondescript rug lay before the fire. There was no other carpet on the floor.

Sawney left the room to have the luggage brought up.

Erma laid her sleeping child upon the bed, and then threw herself into the armchair before the fire.

Old Minty stood, looking sadly around her, and at length spoke out:

"Young mist'ess!"

"Well, Minty?"

"I do wonder if dere's any Christ'an mission'ries ebber come ober f'om our country to dis benighted part ob de Lord's worl'?"

Mrs. Wolfsohn turned and looked at the speaker for a moment, and then said:

"Why, Minty, this is a Christian country, and Christian missionaries came in the old times from this country to ours, which was in a state of heathenism."

"Dis a Christ'an country? Well, mist'ess, I is glad to hear it; but I shouldn't a-know'd it, not to look at it, I shouldn't."

The entrance of the two grooms, bringing in Erma's large trunk between them, put an end to the conversation.

The men retired, and old Minty opened the trunk. Erma washed her face, brushed her hair, arranged her dress, and went down into the oak parlor. There she found her father waiting supper for her. They sat down to the table.

The supper consisted of oatmeal porridge and milk, haggiss, cock-a-leekie, hotch-potch, black bread and cold pork.

Erma and her father made a repast of oatmeal porridge and milk, and after supper she took a bowl of the same up to her chamber, lest the little Rodolph, who had eaten nothing since noon, should wake and be hungry.

But "Rody" did not wake, even through the trying ordeal of being undressed and put into his nightgown. He slept the sleep of health and fatigue.

On investigation Erma found a little closet room ad-

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joining her spacious chamber, and containing a small bed, in which she accommodated Minty.

And when her father came up to retire, and stopped at her door to bid her good-night, she ascertained, to her comfort, that his room was near her own, with only the width of the upper hall between them, and that he also had a closet adjoining his chamber for the accommodation of his man servant.

And in a few more moments the weary travelers had all retired; and so ended their first evening at Heather House.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WANDERER.

Ah! not the ceaseless change of shifted place
Can from the heart a settled grief erase;
Nor can the freshening balm of foreign air
Heal the distempered mind of painful care.
—LORD LYTTLETON.

Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untraveled, fondly turns to thee—
Still to my "husband" turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain.
—GOLDSMITH.

Erma was awakened early the next morning by being crawled over and kissed by little Rodolph, who finished his efforts to arouse her by trying to pull open her eyelids —a common trick of the youngster.

Her sleep had been so profound and oblivious that, on waking up, she could not at first remember where she was. But a glance around the vast room, with its huge chimney and little, deep-set, diamond-paned lattice windows, its oaken floor and bare walls, soon brought to mind the long, wearisome journey of the preceding day, that ended with the midnight arrival at Heather House.

She kissed and played with her child a little while, and then leaving him sitting in the middle of the great, marque-looking bedstead, she arose, thrust her feet into slippers, and went to the nearest window to look out and see what the scene was like by daylight.

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The little casements had neither curtains nor shutters, yet she could see nothing for the heavy mist that hung over everything and liquified and trickled from the outside of the window panes.

It was a damp, dark, dismal day for their first one in this dreary old northern mansion.

Erma came back shivering from the cheerless view and sat down before the smoldering fire in the yawning fireplace.

The movement in the room had meantime awakened old Minty, who was heard to get up and bustle about to put on her clothes.

She soon appeared, saying:

"Good-mornin', mist'ess. Hopes you slept well, ma'am, you an' de chile?"

"We slept like death, we were both so worn out with fatigue, Minty. How did you rest?"

"Hebbenly, chile! Nebber stirred till I heard you an' de little one rompin' here," answered the woman, as she proceeded to replenish the dull fire from a rough basket of wood and coal that stood upon the broad hearth.

"Lay the wood across the andirons, and put the lumps of coal on top," said Erma.

"Yes, mist'ess; but whoebber heard of a fire made outen bofe wood an' coal in a open fireplace? An' sich coal, too! Lor' save us, mist'ess! It burns wid a blue blaze an' smells o' brimstone! 'Deed, it 'minds me ob de bad place wot poor sinners is to go to!"

And the bituminous lumps soon began to fill the room with a sulphurous atmosphere, that might have been healthy, but was certainly not pleasant.

Erma, therefore, made her morning toilet as quickly as possible, and finished by the time Minty had washed and dressed the child.

Erma took little Rody by the hand and led him downstairs, and into the large, bare room where they had supped the night before.

There she found the breakfast table set and her father seated in the great leathern armchair between the corner of the table and the fire, waiting for her.

"Are you going to stay here long, papa?" she inquired, after she had kissed him good-morning.

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"No, my dear, I think not—not longer than I can possibly help," replied Mr. Herne, as he raised an iron hand bell from the table and rang for breakfast.

Old Sawney answered the summons by appearing with a waiter several yards in circumference, and laden with many dishes. He held it on his head, supporting it at each end with his strong hands.

He set it down and arranged the dishes.

The breakfast proved to be a partial repetition of the supper of the night before—oatmeal porridge, oatmeal cakes, rye bread, bacon, eggs, haggiss and coffee.

Sawney waited on the table, but Minty came in to attend little Rody, who always took his milk and bread at the same table with his mother and grandfather.

"If I had knowed wot dis breakfas was gwine to be like, mist'ess, I would a got up and made you some cream toas' an' frisky chicken. I'll do it anoder time—see if I don't," whispered Minty, on perceiving that her mistress could eat but little of the viands set before her.

"What will you do with yourself to-day, my dear Erma?" inquired Otho Herne, as they arose from the table. "As for me, I am expecting Croxton here every minute—Croxton, you know, the solicitor of the late master. But how will you get through the forenoon, my dear?"

"I shall take Minty and little Rody with me and go over the house. Afterwards I shall have some needlework to do in my room. I shall get along very well, papa," replied Erma.

And at the same moment a resounding knock at the outer door announced the arrival of the lawyer.

Erma led her boy out of the room, followed by Minty.

The father and daughter did not meet again until the early two o'clock dinner."

"I think, my love," said Mr. Herne, as he took his seat at the table, "that I have now made an arrangement which will please you and others who are interested, as well as it pleases me."

"What is it, papa?" inquired Erma.

"Sawney, you may go now. We do not need your attendance any longer. We can wait on ourselves," said Mr. Herne, in three different clauses, with a pause be-

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tween, for the serving man seemed to find a difficulty in understanding that he was dismissed.

As soon as Sawney had left the room, Mr. Herne said:

"My dear Erma, you are aware, I suppose, that I am a very distant relative, even though next of kin and heir-at-law of the late master of Heather House."

"Yes, papa."

"You know, I suppose, that I never saw this place until I came to it last night for the first time."

"Yes, I do."

"And you have heard that though I was a native born Englishman, and the descendant of a long line of English landed gentry, yet I was taken at a very early age by my parents to America."

"Certainly, papa."

"It follows, then, that I have scarcely any recollection of my native country, and no ties of association with our ancestral home."

"I suppose not. And, really, it is not all attractive," said Erma.

"Not to you or me," said Mr. Herne, laughing; "but it is very attractive to another and still more distant scion of the house of Herne. A young man—John Stockton Herne—whose father made an enormous fortune in the China trade, and left it all to his only son and heir, is anxious to retire from business at once and set up as a country gentleman. No estate seems to quite suit him half as well as this rude old place, simply because it was the ancient stronghold of his remote forefathers."

"I am sure I honor him for that feeling," said Erma.

Her father laughed.

"My dear," he said, "the young fellow is proud and ambitious. He wants to wipe out the very memory of the shop, and be known only as Herne, of Heather House. He would pay double the worth of the place sooner than not have it; and will spend double that again in 'restoring' it. Well, I have directed Croxton to effect the sale."

"But, father, you never would ask the extreme price he would be willing to pay? You never would take advantage of his hobby to——"

"Pooh! pooh! my dear. What do you take me for? I told Croxton to fix a just price, and to complete the sale

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as soon as he can. I leave everything in his hands; and, my dear, we leave this place just as soon as the weather clears."

That was a good hearing for Erma, who, as soon as dinner was over, told the news to her own servants.

Four days from that, Erma, with her child, her father and their servants left Heather House for York, where they remained one day to view the cathedral.

They then commenced their journey southward, traveling by short stages, and stopping at all the principal cities on the route.

At this slow rate they reached London at the end of a week. They stopped over Sunday to attend divine service at St. Paul's church.

The next day they set out on what Mr. Herne called a historical and antiquarian tour through the south of England—Cornwall, Wales and the Channel Islands. They spent the months of April and May in these mild regions, and on the first of June returned to Portsmouth and took steamer to Glasgow, whence they commenced a midsummer tour through the Highlands of Scotland and the Orkney and Shetland Islands.

While at Glasgow, Otho Herne had written to his London bankers, and drawn a large sum of money, telling them at the same time to forward all letters that might come for them after the tenth of June to Constantinople, for which place his party intended to sail on that day.

But when the tenth of June came and found Otho Herne and his daughter at Edinboro, suffering with heat, he very suddenly determined to go farther north instead of touring to the south, and they sailed the next day for Norway.

Not until the steamer was under way did Otho Herne remember a great oversight. He had forgotten to write from Edinboro to his London bankers and countermand his orders about sending his letters to Constantinople.

The thought worried him considerably, but he would not tell his daughter of it lest it should disturb her peace also.

He resolved to do the best he could to repair his mistake, by writing as soon as he should reach Stockholm, and telling them where to send his letters.

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The first thing, therefore, that Otho Herne did on arriving in Stockholm and settling his party at their hotel, "The Kung Karl," was to write to his London agents to forward his letters to that city.

But by some mishap that letter never reached its destination, and the Messrs. Babbage, bankers, continued to forward the mail of Mr. Herne and his party to Constantinople, and to report to all corresponding inquirers the information received in their last letter to the firm, namely, that the travelers had gone for a lengthened tour in the East.

That news went to America, and filled Erma's devoted friends with sorrow, and plunged her repentant husband into despair.

All this time Mr. Herne and his daughter were spending the summer in traveling through Norway, Sweden and Russia. In the autumn they came down through Germany and Italy, and they settled for a few weeks at Rome.

Mr. Herne had wondered much at receiving no letters from England or from America; but he had set the fact down at first to the slowness and irregularity of the continental mails, and ever in departing from any one city he would leave orders at the post office to have his mail forwarded to the next city of his sojourn. But as weeks passed into months, and still he got no letters, he began to ascribe the fact to the carelessness of his friends.

"You know they always were wretched correspondents, Erma—the women more acccustomed to knitting needles and the men to fowling pieces and game bags than to pen and paper," he said, by way of consoling his despondent daughter.

But Erma was incapable of receiving comfort. She longed to hear some news of her husband, who had been as one dead to her since the day, now more than twelve months ago, when he had spurned her from his side and scornfully left her. She had received letters from Beth Morset regularly up to the time of Otho Herne's departure to Sweden.

After that, Beth Morset's letters went with the rest of the Herne's mail to Constantinople.

At length the patience of father and daughter became

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exhausted, and from Rome they wrote both to London and to their friends in America to ascertain the cause of this silence.

But a fatality seemed to attend their correspondence.

In the troubled state of Italy at that period the mails might have been irregular and unreliable; I do not know; but it is certain Otho Herne and Erma Wolfsohn received no answer to their missives.

After waiting some time, our travelers left Rome, having given directions at the post office where any letters that might come for them should be forwarded.

They did not, however, go to Constantinople. Mr. Herne had changed his mind again, and Erma, too indifferent to care whither she went, made no objection to the new route.

They, therefore, sailed from Civita Vecchia for Algiers, for a tour through the Barbary States.

It would be tedious to my readers to follow them through all their wanderings.

It is enough to say that these wanderings occupied years, during which their friends in America heard nothing of them, either through letters or rumors.

* * * * * * *

In the meantime, Rodolph Wolfsohn, the repentant husband, had been traveling through the East in search of his discarded wife.

He pursued the old route that they were supposed to have taken, through Turkey, Egypt and the Holy Land, and after a journey of many months as weary and, toward the last, as hopeless as that of the Wandering Jew, he came back to Constantinople, whence he sailed for New York, with the forlorn hope that he might find Erma in her native land, perhaps, settled on her estate at Brighthome.

It was at the close of a hot day in July, after an absence of three years, that he arrived by the stagecoach at the "Red Fox," looking so gaunt, swarthy and aged that the jolly landlord scarcely knew him.

And here he met, by the merest chance, Lawyer Drummond, who had come to the wayside tavern on some business.

The lawyer gave him a cordial welcome, and the two

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gentlemen were soon seated in a private parlor for a *tête-à-tête*.

Here more than a cruel disappointment met him.

On anxiously inquiring for Erme, he learned that his injured wife was still an absentee and that no one of her friends knew anything of her whereabouts.

"Who receives her rents for Brighthome? Who keeps her accounts here? Who manages her affairs?" inquired Wolfsohn with restless repetition.

"I do. I receive her rent and pay it into our local bank to her credit. There it will remain until she or her heirs come to claim it. You can examine the books, if you like," said Drummond.

"No, I do not care to do that. It is very strange that they are never heard from," mused Rodolph Wolfsohn.

"Very. And a pity, too, that all that money is lying idle and constantly accumulating in the bank, when it ought to be invested."

Rodolph made no reply to this. To do him justice, he was not interested in the money. He had only inquired about Erma's business in the hope that it might give some clew to her present place of abode.

"And I hope you will find, Wolfsohn, that I have managed your estate at Darkwood to your satisfaction. The overseer and the farm laborers have done their duty, and the revenues of the place have been very fair. The books are open to your inspection," continued Drummond.

"Oh, I don't doubt it! I don't doubt it! Thanks!" exclaimed Rodolph, impatiently.

"Are you going on to Ice Cliff, Wolfsohn? If you are, I can give you a lift. My rig is outside."

"Thanks, yes. I shall be glad," replied Rodolph, in no very "glad" tone.

"Well, we will have a bit of supper first here by ourselves," said Drummond, ringing the bell.

The supper was served and discussed, and then the two friends entered the gig to go to Ice Cliff.

Mr. Wolfsohn took only his valise with him, leaving his heavy luggage at the inn until further orders.

He went home that night with his friend, Drummond, to remain at the latter's house until the next day.

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There Wolfsohn found a happy fireside.

Bab Bibb, now Mrs. Drummond, was a pretty, dark-eyed, plump little matron, with two tiny girls that were, respectively, six months and eighteen months old, and were miniatures of herself. The name of the eldest was Erma; the youngest was Bab.

Rodolph was half cheered, half saddened by this sight of this pretty little domestic circle; but he spent a calm and peaceful evening.

The next day he went around the neighborhood to call upon his old friends.

He found many changes in the three years of his absence.

Miss Barbra Gunn now lived alone with her servants, and had grown, if possible, more uncompromising, harsh and sarcastic than she had ever been before.

To Rodolph's anxious inquiries she answered, sharply:

"No! We haven't heard a word from Erma since she went away! I told you then that she had gone to Constantinople, and was going on to Asia and Africa, where, I had no doubt, she would be massacred by Arabs, or eaten by cannibals, and the event has proved that I was right; for what other fate could have befallen her party, since we never hear from them?"

Rodolph did not inflict his company long upon Miss Gunn. He went from The Marsh to Brighthome, where he felt sure of sympathy from Beth Morset. He found that happy wife and mother surrounded by her family—a fine boy of two years, and twin girls of ten months. Beth could only repeat the news that he had heard from others—namely, that she had had no intelligence of the travelers since his last departure from the neighborhood.

That night Rodolph took possession of his desolate home at Darkwood—how desolate he never knew until he had tried it.

He determined to settle down there to the quiet country life for which he had sighed during his long exile.

Here, he thought, was the best prospect of meeting Erma again.

He might traverse the world over in search of her, and yet not succeed in finding her.

But if he remained patiently at home, some day—per-

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haps soon—she also would be returning home, and he should have her in his longing arms again.

At Darkwood Rodolph would have lived the life of an anchorite if his kindly neighbors would have permitted it.

But you know what these neighbors were. They would not let a man or woman alone in misery.

They visited him, and compelled him to receive them. They invited him to their houses, and constrained him to go. There was no such thing as holding out against the homely love of his old neighbors.

But as time went on and no news came of Erma or her party, either in answer to letters or to his carefully worded advertisements, intended to be intelligible only to her, Rodolph Wolfsohn's feelings experienced a gradual but powerful reaction. He began to think that Erma had cased to love him, and that she was keeping herself out of his way on purpose, and perhaps in a spirit of revenge. Again his jealous and suspicious nature wronged her with a worse thought—the thought that she might have formed another attachment—might have even procured a legal dissolution of her bonds to him, and formed another marriage.

It would be just like such a father as Otho Herne to encourage such a step in his daughter under such circumstances.

But that Erma should act upon such advice; that Erma should indeed experience any diminution of love and loyalty to him—Rodolph Wolfsohn—or that she should form another attachment—this was intolerable! He began to hate Erma, or to think that he hated her.

About this time he wrote again to Babbage Brothers, London, to know if they had any news of the travelers. At the end of a month he got his answer: The Messrs. Babbage had had no business relations with Mr. Herne, or his daughter, Mrs. Wolfsohn, for three years and a half, and knew nothing of their present place of abode.

"They have withdrawn themselves entirely from my knowledge and pursuit. They have gone away and cut down the bridge behind them. Let them go!" said Rodolph Wolfsohn, in his wrath.

But after this he could not stay at Darkwood.

So he left the estate in the charge of a capable over-

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seer, drew all his money from the bank, paid Cousin Wally his loan, with many sincere expressions of gratitude, and quitted the neighborhood.

Where did he go?

To "parts unknown."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE END OF ERMA'S WANDERINGS.

How heavily she journeys on the way,
When what she seeks, her weary journey's end,
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say:
"Thus far the miles are measured from my friend;
For this same rest doth put this in my mind—
My grief lies onward and my joy behind."
—SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

Erma and her father traveled over all the civilized world, and as much of the uncivilized as they could reach.

They spent four years in going over Europe, Asia and Africa; then they took passage from Cape Town and sailed for Rio de Janeiro. They passed another year in traveling over every portion of South America, from Brazil to Chili and Guiana to Patagonia and Terra del Fuego—to which last place they went in a whaling ship.

In the meantime Erma had grown to think that her husband had never repented his cruel repudiation of herself, and that he had quite ceased to care for her—that perhaps he had formed another attachment—perhaps had got his lawful union with herself annulled, and united himself to some other woman. For, ah! sacred marriage was held in so little reverence in those free-thought, free-love days! If this was not the case, why had he not written to her in all these years?

In fact, Erma had the same thoughts about Rodolph that he had entertained of her.

The long misunderstanding and estrangement between the jealous husband and the discarded wife was beginning to break down all their mutual confidence.

Otho Herne's whole party kept together in all their wanderings, although the tender age of the growing child and the advanced age of the negro servants might have

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seemed to forbid the fatigue and exposure of such long journeys through such variable climes; but little Rody and old Septimus and Minty bore it all very well.

The boy's education was not in the meantime neglected. It was Mr. Herne's favorite pastime at all their stopping places and on all their long voyages to instruct his young grandson. And Rody was so apt a pupil that he learned very rapidly, so that when he was about ten years old his grandfather talked about taking him to England and placing him at some preparatory school.

The party were then again at Rio de Janeiro, where they spent the winter. Early in the spring following they sailed for Liverpool, and on reaching that port took the train to London.

That year the boy was entered in the preparatory class of Eton College.

Erma was at first very much opposed to this measure, but she yielded to it for her son's sake. And they took lodgings in the town of Windsor, to be in easy reach of the boy, whom they both idolized.

Here the father and daughter, with their two old servants, lived in a restful seclusion, until their peace was broken by the illness and death of Otho Herne.

Erma was for a time prostrated with grief for the loss of her father, the only friend she seemed to possess in the world, with the exception of her two old servants and her young son.

Soon after the funeral she felt an impulse to return to America; but when she remembered all that she had suffered there, her very soul shrank from the prospect, and she resolved to remain where she was, at least until Rodolph's Eton course should be completed.

She had never once spoken to the boy of his father, for what could she say to him of her husband?

It was not until he had been at Eton some time that a school-fellow inquired if that pretty woman in deep mourning who came to see him sometimes was not his mother.

Rodolph answered, proudly:

"Yes."

"And is she a widow?" further asked the lad.

"Oh, yes," replied Rodolph, who as long as he had

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been capable of thinking on the subject had taken it for granted that she was.

"How long has your father been dead?" pursued the inquisitive schoolmate.

"Oh, ever so long. Ever since I was a baby, I suppose, for I don't remember my father at all."

"Ever since you were a baby, and she wearing mourning all this time?"

"Oh, no. Her mourning is now for my grandfather, lately deceased. But I do remember when my mother still wore mourning for my father. I remember it by the surprise and joy I felt the first day she put it off and dressed herself in pretty colors. Why, I was as astonished and delighted as if my black crow had suddenly changed his plumage for that of a bird of paradise! I recollect it distinctly, though I could not have been more than three years old," said Rodolph, thinking that he was speaking the exact truth, though he made a great mistake; for what he did so well remember was the day that his mother had left off her mourning that she had worn for Clement Gladden.

"Oh! then your father must have been dead for at least two or three years and you must have been a very little fellow when he died?" continued Rody's school friend.

"Yes, I suppose so," said the former.

"You 'suppose' so? Why, don't you know, Wolfsohn?"

"N-n-o, I don't; I don't remember, you see. I was too young."

"But don't your mother tell you about him?"

"N-n-o," replied Rody, slowly and hesitatingly.

"That's odd. But maybe it is too painful a subject."

Rodolph made no reply, but he fell into more serious thought concerning his deceased father than he ever had experienced before.

He was now a fine boy of thirteen years. The midsummer holidays were at hand, when he was to come out of school to join his mother in a tour through Scotland.

Rody, whose thoughts had been accidentally directed by his school-fellow to the subject, determined to question his mother in regard to his deceased father.

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On the very night of the day when he reached the pretty "Cottage in the Grove" where his mother lodged, and while they were seated out in the cool garden, eating apricots, the boy suddenly lifted his head and inquired:

"Mamma, how old was I when my father died?"

"Rody!" exclaimed Erma, with a violent start, for the question had taken her by surprise—had shocked her.

"I think I was about three years of age, but I don't exactly know."

She did not answer. She could not answer yet. She knew not what to say.

"My father died very young, didn't he, mamma? What was the matter with him? Was it consumption? Don't most people who die young die of consumption? And don't old people always die of the gout, or apoplexy, or paralysis—like grandpapa did?"

The boy had asked all these questions with a pause between each one, waiting for an answer.

Erma gave none.

"What was the matter with papa that made him die so young? It was consumption, wasn't it, mamma?" he inquired, repeating his question with a child's persistence.

"Who told you that your father was dead, Rody?" inquired Erma, in a hollow voice.

The boy stared, both at the question and the tone in which it was put.

"Why, no one told me! I knew it myself! Of course I did!" he answered, still staring.

"How did you know it, Rody?" she inquired, in the same hollow tone.

"Why—why," said the lad, in a hesitating voice, "I think—I remember when he died. I know I remember when you were in mourning for him. I remember that by the day you left it off. I was glad to see you in colors! It was such a pleasant surprise! What did my father die of? Was it consumption?"

Erma burst into tears, and, covering her face with her hands, sobbed aloud.

Rody jumped up, dropping his plate of apricots on the grass, and went to her, crying:

"Oh, mamma! mamma! have I hurt you? I did not

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mean it! Oh, I am so sorry! Oh, I have heard that some sorrows can never bear to be touched, and this is one! I will never hurt you so again, mamma! Never!" he repeated, with his arms around her neck, and his lips pressed to her forehead—the only part of her face uncovered by her hands.

Erma sobbed on. What could she say? What could she do?

Leave her boy to believe that his father was dead? Leave him to believe a falsehood? And endorse that falsehood by her silence?

She shrank from such a deception.

Or, on the other hand, should she—could she tell him the bitter truth—that the husband and father had repudiated and abandoned both wife and child? No, she could not—at least, not yet!

As her paroxysm of grief subsided, and she was able to speak, she took the lad's hand in her own, and in a voice still somewhat broken by emotion, she faltered:

"Rody—I cannot speak of this subject now. Some time—dear—I will tell you all about it."

The boy kissed her and sat down again, very thoughtful. His own impression was that his father had died in the first or second year after marriage, and that his mother still secretly mourned him with so fresh a grief that she could not bear to hear his loss mentioned.

The next day they left Windsor for Scotland.

I said that Erma had lived a very secluded life at Windsor. She had, indeed, no neighbors, except the family of the rector of the church she attended and the family of the physician who occasionally attended her. These kind-hearted people, introduced to her by the rector, had sympathized with her lonely condition, after the death of her father, and had tendered many neighborly good offices.

Erma's correspondence with America, broken off by an accident years ago, had never been resumed. Therefore, at the time she set out with her son for their midsummer tour through the Highlands of Scotland, she knew nothing of the clouds that were rising over the political horizon of her native country, although they

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were already beginning to be discussed in the English newspapers and English clubs and family circles.

Erma was a woman behind the age. She was not the least interested in politics. She believed in the safety, the continuous prosperity, and the glorious destiny of her native land through all changes of administration. She did not care the least in the world whether a Democrat or a Whig sat in the presidential chair—

"Invested with a little brief authority"—

very "little" and very "brief" in most cases. So she read, without appreciating them, the headlines in the foreign news columns of the *Times* touching the squally aspect of American affairs. One circumstance she did lazily note—that the contest was no longer between Whig and Democrat, but that it was between Democrat and Republican, and she cared as little about this political contest as she had ever cared for the preceding ones.

But a shock was in waiting for her.

In the August of 1860, after returning from a tour among the lakes and mountains of the Highlands, she found herself one morning at breakfast in the coffee room of the McGregor Hotel at Edinboro. Her son sat opposite to her at the same little table.

A party of four gentlemen occupied seats at a table near them, discussing at once their morning meal and morning news, enjoying together their muffins on their plates and their murders in their papers.

Erma and her son were talking in a low voice of their plans for the day—whether they should go first to Holyrood Palace or to Edinboro Castle—when suddenly a raised voice at the next table struck Erma's ear.

"If the Republican party in the United States succeed in electing their candidate, there will be a civil war in America, ending with the dissolution of the national union!—the end of all republics!"

The speaker was an Englishman, and he spoke in a high, dogmatic, authoritative voice.

At first Erma started slightly and changed color, but the next instant smiled at the dreadful prophecy, and at herself for minding it.

How often had she heard at home each political party

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declare that if the other came into power that the country would go to the dee! She had seen Whigs and Democrats alternately in power, and never, through the administration or maladministration of either, had the country gone to the dee! And why should it, in any event? Providence would never permit the promised land of oppressed humanity to go to destruction.

Erma went out with her son to view Holyrood Palace and Edinboro Castle without a thought of impending calamity to her native country.

Ah! but she soon had cause to recollect that ominous croak of the stout, old English gentleman in the coffee room of the McGregor Hotel in Edinboro—and she remembers it to this day, as we remember the first gun fired on Fort Sumter.

My readers, North and South, I have one word to say to you at this juncture.

If the true domestic history at the foundation of this story had not had its startling denouement at the Battle of the Wilderness, I should not touch this subject.

I shrink with deepest pain from the recollection of of our civil war, with all its unimaginable horrors and sorrows; for with near relatives and dear friends in both opposing armies, who fell in battle on both sides, my heart was bleeding all the time.

Enough! Let us return to Erma, smiling in her "fool's paradise" over the Englishman's prophecy, but destined to remember it again with a shudder.

She repaired to Windsor with her son, and he reentered his college.

Now she took some little interest in the foreign news, which, as the year drew to its close, became more and more exciting; yet not so much to her as to others. She was still under a delusion as to the perfect safety and permanent prosperity of her native country.

She laughed when either the rector or doctor, her only two male friends, spoke to her of the impending trouble.

News came of the election of Abraham Lincoln, and of the more violent disturbances that followed.

Still, Erma, as well as most other Americans resident abroad, was lulled into a false security. Soon after arrived the most startling intelligence of all that had pre-

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ceded it—the secession of South Carolina, to be quickly followed by that of other States. In March came the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, after his guarded passage through troubled Baltimore.

Even when the news reached England of the firing upon Fort Sumter, we Americans resident abroad were as little alarmed as the unbelievers in the days of Noah.

The deluge was upon us, but we told each other that the shower would soon be over.

Who, indeed, could believe in a prolonged civil war, even though Fort Sumter had been besieged and taken by the Confederates?

And so that spring and summer passed with its arriving news of battles won and lost. Yes, and every one seemed to absentees to be—"only the clearing up shower," not the deluge, by any means.

It was again the midsummer holidays, now in the year 1861.

Erma and her boy were spending them quietly at the Isle of Wight.

It was on the morning of the thirty-first of July that they came down to the coffee room of the Eagle Hotel, at Ryde, where they were stopping.

While waiting for their breakfast, Rody opened the *Times,* which he had bought of the newsvender in the hall. But the boy had scarcely glanced at the first page when he uttered an exclamation:

"Oh, mother!"

"What is it?"

"A great battle!—a horrible battle!—an awful battle! —and the rout of the Union army!"

Erma seized the paper.

It was the London *Times* with Mr. William Russell's long letter containing a full narrative of the fatal Battle of Bull Run.

That was an eye-opener as well abroad as at home.

Erma devoured with eyes and mind the details of that disaster.

She forgot to order breakfast as she read eagerly, breathlessly, awfully, down column after column, until suddenly a half-suppressed shriek burst from her lips.

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She had seen a name in the list of the wounded that seemed to freeze her already chilled blood.

It was the name of Col. Rodolph Wolfsohn. And this was the very first news that she had received of her husband since that day, now more than twelve years since, when he had scornfully spurned and abandoned her and her son! And now to see his name among the dangerously wounded at the Battle of Bull Run!

"What is it, mother?" was now Rody's turn to inquire, on hearing her half-suppressed cry, and seeing her stare at the paper as if she had no power to withdraw her eyes.

"What is it, mother?" he repeated, as she did not heed his first inquiry.

She roused herself then and stared at him instead of at the paper.

"Oh, mother, what can it be?" he exclaimed.

"We must go home immediately, Rody," she answered, hurriedly, half rising from her chair as if to start on the instant.

"To Cottage in the Grove? To Windsor?"

"No! To America! To Washington City—to which the Union army has retreated."

"Mother!"

"Take the paper, Rody, and see when the first steam packet sails for America."

The boy obeyed.

"The very first is the Cunard steamship, *Asia,* that is to sail from Liverpool for New York on Saturday," said Rody, when he had examined the shipping intelligence.

"And this is Thursday. We will start for London within an hour, run down to Windsor, pack up, cross to Holyhead and meet the steamer at Queenstown. Yes, we must go by the *Asia.*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

GOING HOME.

Twelve long years of exile borne—
Yes, twelve she numbered ere her sad return.

—DRYDEN.

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So, after years, she comes, her travel spent,
Less knowing of her fate than when she went.
—BISHOP KING.

Erma and her son left Ryde that day for Southampton, whence they took the train to London.

A few hours Erma remained there to get bills of exchange negotiable in New York, and to secure tickets for herself and party for the steamer that was to sail on Saturday from Liverpool for New York.

Then she and her boy went down to Windsor, where they arrived to the great surprise of Septimus and Minty, who had not expected them until the last of September.

But when Erma informed the faithful couple that they were all to sail for America on the next Saturday, surprise was elevated to amazement and delight.

And all the rest of the day, while packing up their mistress' effects, they went about the house, singing:

"Oh, carry me home! Carry me home!
To ole Virginny shore!"

Erma found time in the midst of her great hurry to call on the rector's family, and there she heard a piece of startling intelligence, to the effect that she would have to take the oath of allegiance to the United States Government, and procure a passport from the United States Consul, before she, a native-born American, would be allowed to land on the shores of her mother country.

This necessitated a journey to London and to the consul of that port.

Not only Erma, but her son, had to go through a minute examination under oath, touching their age, occupation, nativity and loyalty, before they could get the requisite passports.

This done, they returned and gave up their furnished villa by paying the remainder of the year's rent, and the next morning the whole party ran up to London by train, and took the "Irish mail" for Dublin, via Holyhead.

In thirteen hours after leaving London they reached Kingston, connected immediately with the train for Queenstown, where, on the following morning, they met the *Asia*, and embarked for New York.

The midsummer voyage across the ocean was a very

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pleasant one; no storm ruffled the sea; fair winds prevailed, so that on the ninth day after leaving Queenstown the *Asia* landed at her pier in New York.

It was sunset, and Erma and her party, having a considerable amount of luggage, were detained a long time at the custom house. When she got through she found that she had missed the afternoon train for Washington, and must wait for the midnight express.

She waited at the Jersey City station, and contented herself with such a lunch as she could get in the refreshment room for herself and her party, for in her impatience to go on she would not go to any hotel lest by any chance she should miss the train.

Midnight came, and amid the tremendous rush of passengers and freight cars, Erma found herself and her son on the thickly crowded cars, with the two colored servants seated before them, and very smouldering and smoking lamps hanging above them. There was a close and suffocating atmosphere of perspiring bodies, stale tobacco smoke and unclean clothing, which savored of the worst kind of packed tenement house; at first Erma could scarcely see her surroundings, but when her eyes became accustomed to the dim light she perceived that the cars were full of soldiers—some volunteer regiment on its way to the seat of war.

Erma was no battle-ax heroine; indeed, she was not at all heroic. Her soul was not fired with the admiration of military ardor; her heart was melted with pity and her spirits oppressed with fear for these war-bound soldiers—these sons, brothers, lovers, husbands, leaving all they loved and going forth to certain suffering and probable death.

"I want to enlist in some regiment, mother—I want to go to the war, too. I am old enough, I reckon. I was fourteen last March," whispered Rodolph, after he had listened some time to the talk of the soldiers.

"Hush! hush, Rody! You do not know what you are saying!" said Erma, with a shudder.

"But I want to go to the war, mother," persisted the boy, with boyish tenacity of purpose.

"We will go to the war, Rody. We will follow the army, not to take any part in the destruction of life, but,

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if it please Heaven, the saving of it. It was for this cause that I came back to our country," replied Erma.

Rody looked dissatisfied. He did not want to be a hospital nurse; he wanted to be a soldier.

As the train rushed on through the midnight darkness and drew nearer to the border line, the signs of war, if not "the alarms of war," grew more apparent.

At Philadelphia another regiment of volunteers got into the cars, crowding them nearly to suffocation, though several additional ones had been put on.

At Havre de Grace the same thing happened.

Volunteers were pouring from all parts of the country to swell the numbers of the Grand Army of the Potomac, then being organized by Gen. McClellan at Washington City.

The long and cumbrous, over-crowded train moved slowly, so slowly that it was near day when it drew near the city of Baltimore. Here, while it was still dark, Erma noticed gleaming fires at regular intervals on each side of the road as the train labored on.

"What are those lights?" she inquired of an officer who stood up in the middle of the car, as he had stood all the way from Havre de Grace.

"Picket guard, mum," answered the man, shortly but civilly.

They reached Baltimore and were delayed an hour or more. A regiment got off and another regiment got on. Dawn was reddening in the east. Erma and her party were faint with famine and fatigue, yet dared not leave their seats lest they should not be able to find even standing room on their return.

A kind-hearted officer, seeing their extremity, shouted to a porter through the car window and called him up. Through the porter's help, refreshments were served—the most abominable black coffee, sour bread and eggs grown hard as bullets through many boilings.

"One mustn't grumble at grub in war times," said a young soldier, making a grimace at the wretchedly depressing "refreshments."

The train moved at last out of the dismal depot, and labored along on its way to the capital—long, heavy, lumbering, over-crowded, stifling.

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Such was railway traveling in that region during the war.

Out in the country again the little huts of boughs, at regular intervals on each side the road, marked the posts of the picket guards.

How the face of the country was changed! Everywhere, everywhere signs of war!

The train reached Washington about seven o'clock in the morning—tents, camp posts, quarters, everywhere in the suburbs; soldiers everywhere in the city!

Erma felt as if in some evil dream her spirit had slid down the descent of centuries and struck with a shock into the middle ages!

But the unprecedented bustle around the railway station recalled her to the recognition of the year 1861.

On that morning a carriage was not to be obtained for love or money.

Erma, accompanied by her son and followed by her two servants, leaving the light luggage of the party, walked to the nearest respectable hotel, where, after some difficulty, she got a single room on the fifth floor for her whole party.

Without waiting for rest or refreshment, she left her servants in her room at the hotel, and, taking her young son for an escort, she went down to the "office" to inquire for the headquarters of the Grand Army of the Potomac.

She was told that they were on Pennsylvania Avenue, opposite the President's Square.

She set off with her son to walk that distance, for there seemed to be no carriages to be hired, and though there were many busses, yet they were all crowded, and mostly by soldiers inside and on both platforms.

Hers was a long and weary walk, and, on reaching her destination, a weary waiting before she could find any responsible officer who knew enough and had leisure enough to answer her questions.

She did not announce herself as the wife of Capt. Rodolph Wolfsohn. She merely inquired as to his health and his whereabouts. She did not know the number of his regiment, nor did the officer whom she interrogated.

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He had to refer to the Army Roll before he came back with the information:

"Capt. Wolfsohn is on active duty with his regiment at Poolesville."

"Then, of course, he was not wounded at the Battle of Bull Run, as was reported, or else he has recovered from his wounds," said Erma.

"I—suppose—one or the other," replied the officer, vaguely. "I will see if I can find out."

And he was off again, and presently returned with the additional information:

"Capt. Wolfsohn was wounded—was in the Marion House Hospital for three weeks, and then went to join his regiment, a part of Gen. McCall's division, at Poolesville."

"Where is Poolesville?" she next inquired.

"About fifteen miles up the river."

Erma asked some other questions about the possibility of getting there, and finally, having thanked her patient informant for his courtesy, she arose and left the place.

"Mother," said Rody, as they walked slowly back to their hotel, "who is this Capt. Rodolph Wolfsohn you were asking about? Was he my father's brother? Was I named after him? And oh! what was my father's first name? Do you know that I never even heard that? Could you believe it? But it is true."

"Rody, I will tell you all about your father when we get back to the hotel. The time has come when I must tell you. But not here on the street. We must be in private, and—I must sit down," said Erma, wearily.

When they reached the hotel it was the public luncheon hour.

Erma, thinking of the growing boy's appetite, went into the dining room and sat down at one of the tables, with Rody beside her.

After they had refreshed themselves they went up into their room, where the two old servants still mounted guard over their luggage.

"Haven't you had anything to eat yet?" she inquired.

"No, mist'ess," answered old Septimus. "True for you, mist'ess, one ob doze dere w'ite nigger waiters did put his head in here an' say how dinner were ready for de sar-

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vints, an' we could go down; but I axed him back ag'in did he fink me an' Minty was sich a funnelly fool as to go an' leabe our mist'ess' property for him to come a rampaging ober? Not much! So he went away ag'in."

"Well, go down now and get your dinners," answered Erma, dropping wearily into a seat.

"Won't you hab nuffin yourse'f fust, mist'ess?" affectionately inquired Minty.

"No, I have had a cup of tea, or something they call tea, and I want no more," she answered.

The two old servants moved toward the door.

"Can't we do nuffin' for you downstairs, mist'ess?" again inquired Minty.

"No; when you have had your dinners you can stay downstairs, or take a walk. I shall not want you again before the evening," said the lady.

Then the pair left the room.

Erma locked the door to insure uninterrupted privacy, and then returned to her seat.

"Come and sit down before me, Rody," she said, in a voice so strange that it could never have been recognized as her own.

The boy, in some surprise and alarm, drew a lower chair and seated himself in front of her.

She took both his hands and looked down into his troubled face, and said:

"Rody, my son, do you love your mother?"

"Oh, mamma!" answered the lad, looking still more disturbed.

"But do you love me, Rody?"

"Oh, yes, mamma! Yes! More than anyone else in the whole world! Indeed, I don't love anyone in particular but you! Whom have I got to love but you, mother? What is the matter with you, mother dear? You look so white! You tremble so much! Oh, that long walk was too hard for you!"

"Do you trust me, Rody?" she inquired, sadly, and quite ignoring his question.

"'Trust' you, mother? I honor you above all creatures! I honor you next to the Lord. Whom have I to love and honor on earth but you?"

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"Your father, Rody," she answered, solemnly, covering her face with both hands.

'Mother!" exclaimed the lad, in amazement.

"Oh, Rody, I have been the most unhappy woman of all women!" she cried, in a tone of anguish.

"Mother!" he ejaculated again.

"Rody, do you understand me? You have a living father," she breathed, in a low tone.

"Mother! mother! Can this be true?" inquired the lad, in much perplexity.

She nodded in a suffocating silence.

"But you—you—I thought you told me he was dead."

"No—no, Rody! I never could have told you that, for it was not true!" she moaned.

"No, then, of course, you did not tell me; but some one did. I think some one did."

"No, dear. No one could have told you so. It was not true. Everybody around you knew that he was alive."

"But—but—I always thought you were a widow, and I was an orphan. I always thought you were in mourning for my father when I first remembered you."

"No, dear, I wore black for another friend; but yours was the natural inference from the circumstances, Rody."

The boy remained in thought for some moments, and then inquired:

"Mother, is that Capt. Rodolph Wolfsohn my father?"

"Yes, Rodolph," she answered, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Why do you live apart?"

Erma did not answer then, and her son spoke again:

"Did he love you, mother dear?"

"Yes, Rody."

"And didn't you love him?"

"More than my own life!"

"Then what could have severed you, mother dear?" he inquired, with a very distressed look.

The answer was slow in coming, and very slowly uttered:

"Jealousy, calumny, and fatal false appearances, such as might have deceived an angel of justice, blinded an angel of light!"

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"Were you jealous of him, mother?" inquired the lad.

"Never for an instant."

"He—he—he was not jealous of you, mother! He—no one ever did you that great wrong!" exclaimed the boy, his fair young brow darkening with righteous indignation.

"Rody, dear, I told you that there were calumnies, supported by false appearances, that might have deceived an angel of justice and blinded an angel of light. When I have explained all this to you, Rody, you will understand and—and—not dare to blame your father."

The lad made no reply. The youthful forehead was gathered into wrinkles. The idea that any man—father, king, or pope—should ever have cast the reproach of suspicion upon his loved and honored and idolized mother filled him with anger, hatred and the passionate desire to avenge her upon such a foe.

"Listen to me, Rody," she said, uneasily, "and do not judge until you have heard."

"Mother!" he exclaimed, in a voice full of the very anguish of just wrath.

"It is a long, sad story, dear boy; but when you have heard it you will sympathize——"

"With you, mother! With no one else!" cried the boy.

Then she began at the beginning, and told him the whole story of her life, including the happy childhood and peaceful youth up to the time of the commencement of her sorrows, with that ill-starred voyage on the *Victress*, where the fatal encounter took place between her father, Otho Herne, and his antagonist, Gustave Perlemonte.

She told of the subsequent trial and conviction of her father, of his death sentence, the successful appeal for a new trial, the new verdict of manslaughter, and the second sentence of imprisonment for life.

She told him of her mother's death, of her own destitution, of the necessity of dropping the too notorious name of Herne and retaining only her baptismal name of Erma Wildering; of her engaging as a governess at Brighthome; her meeting with Rodolph Wolfsohn; their love and marriage; her horror at discovering that her bridegroom was the stepson of that Gustave Perlemonte

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for the slaying of whom her father was condemned to imprisonment for life!

She told of the departure of her husband for the Mexican War; of his reported death and her own bitter grief; of the birth of her first and only child some six months after her husband's departure; of the return of Gustave Perlemonte, who had not been killed, after all; and of his turning herself and her child out of her home, over which he had the power of an unconditional life interest.

Finally she told him of the refuge offered to her and her son by old Mr. Clement Gladden, and of the sudden visit of her husband, whose mind, naturally jealous, had been poisoned against her by slanderers, and who, finding her in a position that seemed to warrant all the ill that had been uttered against her, had then and there repudiated and abandoned both herself and her child.

Rody broke out in passionate grief and indignation. It required all Erma's moral force to control him. Again and again she explained and apologized for the fatal mistake of the husband and father, but long without success.

"Mother!" he cried, with impassioned humiliation, "it seems to me, if a man charges with unfaithfulness and repudiates his pure wife, he breaks all bonds between himself and her; and if he denies the paternity of and discards his own child, he discharges that child from all filial duty to himself!"

"Rody! Rody! You must not say that! The wife's and the child's duty remain, whatever the husband and father may do. Rody, we must be faithful! We must convince him that he was mistaken in regard to us both."

"How will you do that, mother? Will you follow him to his regiment and argue with him?"

"No, Rody, for in that case I should fail to convince him."

"How, then, mother?"

"Listen, Rody. You did wish to enlist as a soldier, did you not?"

"Oh, yes, mother! Such is the burning desire of my heart!"

"Then you shall enlist, Rody! Enlist to serve in the same regiment with your father—yes, and in the same company with him!"

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"Oh, I should like that! To be near him on the field! In battle! To show him, by my conduct, what sort of a son he discarded—what sort of a son my mother reared for him!" exclaimed the boy, with proud, bitter passion.

"And to watch over his life and safety, Rody! You are but a youth under fifteen years of age, and he is a man in his maturity. Yet we read, though in a fable, that the mouse once delivered the lion from captivity. There is a great lesson in that fable, Rody. And my prophetic heart whispers that on some blessed day the discarded son may intervene to save the father from danger or from death!" said Erma, solemnly.

"That would be a glorious triumph for you and me, mother! But what will you do after I go?"

"Go, too, Rody! Attach myself to the same regiment in some capacity! Follow the army even to the battle ground as a field hospital nurse!"

"Will he know us, mother?"

"No, for we must not intrude ourselves upon his notice. We have too much self-respect for that, my boy!"

"Indeed, we have! But, mother, how shall we avoid being recognized even by our names?"

"I have thought of that, Rody. We must not take any false names, you know!"

"No! Oh, no!"

"We may, however, drop half our names, and be known only by the other half."

"How? I—don't understand, mother."

"Listen! Your name is Rodolph Wildering Wolfsohn, is it not?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then you will drop every part of your name except Wildering."

"But he may know me by that. The maiden name under which you were married he will be sure to recognize in that of Wildering."

"Not as you shall write and use it! You must write and use the name of Wildering as Will Dering. You will be called 'Dering.'"

"Oh, I see! And you, mother?"

"I will be known as Marie Dering—my first name, long disused, but really mine, being Marie."

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"That is capital!" exclaimed the boy.

"So we shall not be separated, Rody. We shall be near each other and near him. We three shall be together until death, or the end of the war."

"When shall we begin this new life, mother?"

"As soon as possible! To-day, if it were possible! To-morrow, at farthest, I hope!"

"I hope so, too! But, mother, what shall we do with your old servants?" inquired the boy, with affectionate solicitude for those who had loved and tended him all the days of his life.

"Ah! Heaven knows! We cannot send them back to Virginia! We must try to find them some easy home here in the city," replied Erma, thoughtfully.

This long interview between the mother and son had consumed all the afternoon, and might have lasted into the evening but that the sound of the dinner gong startled both like a thunderclap.

"Are you hungry, Rody?" inquired Erma.

"As a bear," answered the boy.

"Then we will go to dinner."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE YOUNGEST VOLUNTEER.

The battle shout and waving plume,
The drum's soul-stirring beat,
The glittering pomp of prosperous war,
The rush of million feet,
The magic of the martial song,
Which told of victories o'er,
Are sights and sounds the dying boy
Shall see, shall hear no more.

—CHARLES SWAIN.

This must be a short chapter. I do not wish to follow Erma and her son through the war, to fight in print "all" or any of its "battles over again." I repeat that I had near relatives and dear friends in both armies, who fell in battle on both sides, and the memory of it all is too grievous to me.

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Erma saw her boy enlisted in the very company of which his father was then the captain.

Erma enrolled herself in that heroic band of women who followed the army as hospital field nurses; she kept with the regiment that held her husband and her son; but her dress was a complete disguise. Her beautiful hair was put back from her face, and entirely concealed under a close-fitting white cap, and a pair of spectacles changed the whole character of her eyes. An easy-fitting, loose green gown, with a deep cape, altered the appearance of her own slight and graceful figure. She was known in the regiment as Mrs. Marie Dering, the mother of that handsome little lad who was called the youngest recruit in the Grand Army of the Potomac, and she was said to be one of the most skillful nurses in the field.

Erma saw her husband for the first time on the day she arrived at Poolesville. It was the hour of the "dress parade," and she saw him at the head of his company. The sight was not sudden. She had been expecting to see him—had been looking out for him. The sight was, therefore, not sudden, yet it nearly overwhelmed her. She could only with the utmost exertion of self-control command her feelings. She saw that he looked old, worn and wretched; and as her starved eyes fed upon the sight of his face she felt how sad, hard and stern it had grown to be.

"He has never relented, and never forgiven me," she said to herself, as she gazed.

Once she saw him smile as his eyes fell on the young recruit who had been mustered into his company, and she asked herself whether any occult sympathy drew the father's heart to the unrecognized son, or was it only the manly soldier's pleasure in meeting with the brave, boyish volunteer?

Erma could not tell.

The horrible battle of Ball's Bluff gave all the field nurses enough to do for many days and weeks and months. And this was Erma's first initiation into the awful beauty of her holy mission.

In the midst of the horror and grief she felt for the victims of that tremendous disaster, she devoutly thanked Heaven that her husband and her son had come safely out

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of that carnage, and in her gratitude she devoted herself with an unwearying energy and patience to the care of the wounded and suffering.

Erma passed the remainder of that year in her merciful work, first on the field and then in the hospitals at Washington.

Early in the spring of 1862 she followed the regiment, in which her husband was now a major, to the Peninsula with McClellan's army.

During all that disastrous summer she followed the army, and was present on every battlefield, ministering to both the material and spiritual needs of the sick and wounded, until, after the second disastrous Battle of Bull Run, the army was withdrawn into Washington and rested from its labors.

One incident touched the mother's heart with pride—the color sergeant of his company had been struck dead by a bullet, and the boy had seized the flag, which he bore throughout the battle, and at last brought safely from the field.

For this service he was promoted, and placed upon the staff of his colonel, that colonel being now Rodolph Wolfsohn.

It was a proud day for mother and son.

After the army was withdrawn into the lines of Washington, "Mrs. Dering" entered upon her arduous work. The city was over-crowded with the sick and wounded and dying. Every public building, except the government offices, was turned into a military hospital—churches, halls, colleges, warehouses, theatres, all suffered this sorrowful metamorphosis.

Meanwhile "Will Dering" remained on staff duty at the headquarters of his regiment.

Thus the boy, at the age of fifteen, found himself in close personal attendance upon his own unrecognizing father.

A strong attachment grew up between the unknowing father and the devoted son.

During the whole remainder of the war they were never separated, either in camp or in battle. Though often engaged in the thickest of the fight, they were

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neither of them ever seriously wounded, or ever taken prisoner.

Erma, on her duty as field hospital nurse, followed the regiment wherever it went; but she avoided attracting the attention of the colonel. She disguised her beautiful head and face under the close-fitting muslin cap and the neutral-tinted spectacles, which she never left off in the daytime except by the bedside of her patients. She disguised her elegant and graceful form under the straight, black stuff gown and large round cape; and she disguised her cultivated mind by refraining from all topics of conversation except upon the subjects of the most material needs of her patients.

It was in the spring of 1864 that the crisis of her trial came. The brigade to which the regiment she followed belonged was ordered to reinforce Gen. Grant's army, then beginning their overland fighting marching toward Richmond.

We all know what that was—how all the roads from the Rapidan to Richmond ran red with the richest blood of North and South.

It was at the Battle of the Wilderness—"A battle"—to quote a contemporary historian—"a battle terrible and indescribable, in those gloomy woods! There is something horrible, yet fascinating, in the mystery shrouding this strangest of battles ever fought—a battle which no man could see, and whose progress could only be followed by the ear, as the sharp and crackling volleys of musketry, and the alternate Union cheer and Confederate yell told how the fight surged and swelled."

In that battle, my reader, your present writer had friends in both armies, who fell on both sides—in that tremendous carnage which was the end of this world to about thirty thousand men!

It was in the afternoon of the last day of the fierce conflict.

Col. Wolfsohn was leading and cheering his men on to force a supposed weak point in the Confederate lines; but the latter had received reinforcements, and the Union troops were beaten back by irresistible and overwhelming numbers.

Col. Wolfsohn, in advance of his men, had his horse

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shot under him. He quickly disengaged himself from the stirrups of his saddle and sprang to the ground just as his reeling steed fell, dying. He was instantly set upon by the Confederates. A cavalry officer, raising his sabre, aimed a blow—a death blow—on the head of the dismounted man; but the blow fell upon the head of the young Adjt. Dering, who, quick as a flash of lightning, had thrown himself before his colonel, and receiving the fatal sabre stroke, fell to the ground.

At the same instant the Union soldiers, rallied by the brave young adjutant, had rushed on impetuously, and beaten off the Confederates.

Col. Wolfsohn knelt by the side of the unconscious lad.

"My brave boy! Oh! my brave boy!" he groaned, not knowing, not even suspecting, how much right he had to call the youth his "boy."

Others gathered around also, for there was a lull at this point on the battlefield just at this instant.

"Take him to the rear! Have him cared for. I will follow. Is he badly hurt?" inquired Wolfsohn.

"He is killed, Colonel," answered a soldier, who had raised the boy in his arms.

"Take him to the rear. I will follow," was the broken-hearted answer.

The men lifted the unconscious lad and bore him off the field, to the sacred "oasis" near the Wilderness Tavern, where the ambulances were drawn up. Here were crowds of dead waiting to be buried on the spot, and crowds of wounded waiting to be nursed on the spot, or to be sent off to Fredericksburg.

Here Erma was receiving and taking care of the wounded, when she saw a group approach, bearing a body that she recognized as that of her son, followed by an officer whom she knew to be her husband.

"Is he badly wounded?" she breathlessly inquired.

"He is dead, madam," answered several voices at once.

"Oh, no, no, no! Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, all a bereaved mother's bitter anguish sharpening her tones, as she wrung her hands and bent above the form of the unheeding boy. "Oh, no, no, no! He is not dead! He shall not die! Oh, my son! my son! Oh, Saviour of the world, who took pity on the widow of Nain, take pity on

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me! for I am a widow, and worse than a widow, and he is my only son! Mine only child! I have none but him! Oh, soldiers, bear him after me! Bring him to my hut! Lay him on my bed!" she wailed, leading the way to a little log house that had been seized for hospital service.

The men brought the boy in and laid him on the rude bunk that did duty as a bed.

Col. Wolfsohn followed and stood by.

"Go find the surgeon of the regiment and bring him here," he said.

The men withdrew from the hut.

The colonel stood by the head of the poor bed.

The nurse was busy among her instruments and stores, and presently came up with a basin, a lancet and bandages.

"Stand aside, sir. Let me come to him," she said, in a very low voice.

The colonel drew back with a sigh.

The nurse began to cut away the coat sleeve of the boy.

"What are you going to do?" inquired the colonel.

"To bleed him," replied the nurse, proceeding to tie tight bandages around the arm, to raise the large vein in the bend of the elbow.

"You had better not. I have sent for the surgeon," said Wolfsohn.

"I cannot wait for the surgeon. I know what I do," replied the hospital nurse, as she took the lancet and with a firm hand and steady eye opened a vein.

The blood would not flow.

"My poor woman, it is useless. The brave boy is dead!" said the colonel, compassionately.

"Oh, no, no, no! I will not have it so! He must not, shall not, die!" wailed the nurse.

"He is your son, I think I heard you say?"

"He is mine only son! Mine only child! And beside him I have no other!" she wailed, in a voice that in her anguish she had forgotten to subdue.

Something familiar, exquisite, but heart-rending in that voice struck the ear and the heart of Rodolph Wolfsohn, but as yet excited no suspicion in his mind. What had this pallid, close-capped, black-robed widow in neutral-colored spectacles to do with any memories of his past?

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Nothing whatever. The sweet, pathetic voice was a delusive likeness to hers; that was all. He spoke again:

"He was a brave, a heroic boy! He has won a soldier's glorious death!"

"He is not dead! He shall not die!" she wailed, watching the orifice in the vein, from which a little drop of half-coagulated blood began to force its way.

"How old was he?" tenderly inquired the colonel.

"'Was he?' 'Was he?' Don't say 'was he!' He is not dead, I tell you! He lives! He lives! And he is seventeen years and two months old!" she cried, in a voice that thrilled him through and through.

"Who are you, woman? And who is he—this boy, who has been as a son to me, and whom I have loved as a son?" he demanded, in a voice shaking with emotion.

"I am Erma, your discarded wife, and he is Rodolph, your disowned son! I devoted him to this service! No, do not mistake me! Not to the service of his country! With the country divided against itself in this fratricidal war, how did I know which side was his country! No! I devoted him to the service of his father. I bade him serve his father even with his life, if necessary! Even unto death, if necessary!" she wailed.

Rodolph Wolfsohn had heard her in perfect silence, staring at her in utter astonishment. Even after she had ceased to speak he still continued gazing at her in dumb amazement for some few minutes, and then broke forth in a voice of anguish:

"Oh, Erma! Erma! I have sought you 'sorrowing' through many years! Where have you hidden yourself from me?"

"Where a repudiated wife should have veiled her humbled head—in utter obscurity!" answered Erma, in a low voice, not looking toward him, but keping her eyes on the orifice in the boy's vein, from which the blood was now trickling in a continuous stream.

"Until the war! And then you followed my regiment and devoted your son to my service! And nobly the young martyr fulfilled his mission! Erma! He, your son, intervened between me and mine enemy! Made himself my shield! Made himself my shield! Received on

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his own young head the fatal stroke that was aimed at mine!"

"He did his duty," she replied.

"Oh, Erma! Why did you send your son—your only son—in his tender age—scarcely fourteen when he enlisted—on such a perilous adventure?"

"It was my duty to send him! It was his duty to go!"

"It has cost him his life!"

"Even if it had I should not regret having so devoted him to death! But it has not! It has not! See! See! He opens his eyes! He will live!" she cried.

The boy drew a deep breath, and looked from the face of his mother to that of his father. Erma was now dressing and binding up his arm.

The boy's eyes were wild as he glanced from one to the other, his face was ashen gray, and his lips bloodless, as he murmured:

"Mother—dear mother—I have—done my duty—I have saved his life—at the cost of my own—I have bought—peace—with my blood. He will—own us now."

With these words the brave boy's breath ceased, his head fell back, his jaw dropped, his eyes fixed and congealed.

With a heart-piercing cry of anguish his mother fell upon her knees beside him, and buried her head in the poor bedclothes.

Rodolph Wolfsohn covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud.

The hut filled with men—the returning comrades of the poor young adjutant—bringing with them, not the surgeon of the regiment, but a young under-graduate of some medical college, who was an acting assistant-surgeon attached to the field hospital service.

All gathered around the poor bed and looked at the body of the young adjutant, and then all made way for the medical officer except the kneeling and despairing mother.

The young assistant-surgeon bent over the body, felt the pulse, listened for the breathing, and perceiving no sign of life, sighed, and looked up, saying:

"Poor fellow! He is gone! I can be of no use here."

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And he turned and left the hut, to go where he might be of some use.

"Oh, my son! my son!" wailed Erma, in a suffocating voice.

"Oh, my brave boy! my brave boy!" groaned Wolfsohn.

"My son! mine only one!"

"Come, Erma! Come, my dear wife! Come away from the scene! Come to my heart!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OVER THEIR SON'S FORM.

That loss is common cannot make
Our own less bitter, rather more—
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening but some heart did break.

—TENNYSON.

Erma continued kneeling by the poor cot, with her face buried in the bedclothes and her arms thrown out over the body of her boy.

"Come, Erma; come, dearest—come away," still pleaded Rodolph.

She did not stir or speak.

Then he dropped upon his knees by her side and put his arm around her.

But she shuddered and shrank away from him. At that supremely agonizing moment she had no word, no thought to give the remorseful husband and father; she could only feel for her boy, her loving, faithful, obedient boy, who had always been a blessing to her, whom she had devoted to him, whose life had been given for his life!

Oh, what a sacrifice to offer up! The loving for the unloving! the true for the false! the innocent for the guilty! In the bitterness of her anguish, Erma could not respond to any of Rodolph's overtures; she could not bear to speak to him—to look at him—even to think of him!

She had, in her mad idolatry, offered up her boy, a blood offering, on the altar of her inordinate affection for

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him; and now she felt as if she had murdered her sinless son for the sake of being reconciled to her sinful husband. Bitter sorrow for her boy's death, fierce remorse for her own act, burning anger against Rodolph Wolfsohn as the cause of all, tore her heart and maddened her brain.

Erma was insane at this moment, and it required all of her powers of self-control to keep her insanity from bursting forth in open frenzy.

Rodolph Wolfsohn had not tact at all. He wished to comfort his wife, and he persevered with caresses until at length she lost all self-control and broke forth in fiercest words:

"For Heaven's sake, let me alone! Let me be! Or, if you must touch me, kill me! kill me! Send me after my boy! I do not wish to live! I will not live! Oh, my boy! my boy!"

"Erma! Oh, what can I say to her, what can I do for her that will not make her worse?" groaned Rodolph, in despair, as he arose from his knees.

The door opened and some one entered the hut.

Wolfsohn turned listlessly to see.

It was the surgeon of the regiment—no undergraduate, no acting assistant, but the surgeon—a man of middle age, mature culture, and wide reputation before he ever volunteered for the humane mission he was now upon—a man of medium height, slight figure, pale, refined face, thin gray hair, and earnest, compassionate blue eyes.

"You sent for me, Colonel," he said, advancing.

"Yes, Dr. Trevor; but it is too late," replied Wolfsohn, incoherently.

"I was engaged in a difficult operation, and came as soon as it was over," said the surgeon, stepping up to the head of the cot—for Erma still knelt at the side, with her head among the bedclothes, and her arms across the body of her boy.

"You have come too late," repeated Wolfsohn.

"Who saw him?" inquired Dr. Trevor, turning down the sheet, and laying his hand on the head of the young soldier.

"Bainby," replied the colonel, naming a young undergraduate of a medical college.

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"Humph!" said the doctor. He was too much of a doctor, too much of a physician, with far too much *l'esprit de corps,* to criticise the youthful A. S. S.; but, like the bored child in the Quaker meeting, he could not help saying "humph!"

"He could do no good, of course. Macbeth exclaims that

> "'Times have been
> That when the brains were out the man would die,
> And there an end.'"

"It seems to be so still," said Rodolph, in bitter humor.

"But 'the brains are' not 'out,'" said the surgeon. Then, turning to the kneeling woman, he requested:

"Mrs. Dering, will you be good enough to move and let me come to this young fellow?"

Erma never stirred.

"Do not disturb her. She is fitter for a lunatic asylum than any other place, poor soul!" said Rodolph Wolfsohn.

The doctor silently stepped back to the head of the cot, took a pocket case of instruments from inside his coat, selected a pair of scissors, and began to cut away the raven-black curls from the top of the boy's head.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Col. Wolfsohn.

"Will you—bring me some warm water in a bowl? There—there is a kettle steaming before that fire, now," said the surgeon, glancing around the room and fixing his eyes upon the hearth.

Col. Wolfsohn obeyed with the meekness of a hospital servant.

The surgeon took a sponge from another pocket, dipped it in the water, and began to wash away the clotted blood from the sabre-cut across the boy's crown.

"What are you going to do, doctor?"

"I am going to dress this wound."

"Dress the wound of a dead boy?"

"He is not dead."

"Not dead?"

"No more than you or I."

"Not dead?"

"No, I say. He is only comatose."

"But Bainby said he was."

"Humph!" said the doctor.

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"Not dead!"

It was the mother's voice that spoke now, as she raised herself to her feet, and with pallid, sharpened features, staring eyes and parted lips confronted the surgeon.

"Not dead, did you say?"

"I said so, Mrs. Dering, and it is true. Compose yourself. You are held to be one of the most self-possessed nurses we have. Come, now, I want your help here," said the doctor, who was still earnestly at work over his patient.

"Oh, but tell me first, will he revive? Can he live?" she cried, clasping her hands closely and gazing in an agony of hope into the doctor's gentle face.

"Perhaps—possibly. What has come to you, Mrs. Dering? You are not used to be so disturbed."

"He is my son! My only one! My all! Oh, will he live? Will he live?" The clasped hands and dilated eyes were raised in the anguish of prayer, as if the surgeon's yea or nay had power over life and death.

"He will live—probably—with your good nursing," said the surgeon, soothingly; "but you must govern yourself, you know," he added.

"Oh, I will! I will! Oh, I thank Heaven for this hope!" she breathed.

And then, with wonderful self control, she became the quiet, prompt, efficient help to the surgeon and his patient that she had always hitherto shown herself to be.

The means the surgeon used were successful.

Rody breathed again and opened his eyes.

Erma, in an "awful joy" that subdued her like a mesmeric spell, sat by the low bed and watched her boy.

Col. Wolfsohn went back to his post. The husband's and the father's feelings had to give place to the soldier's duty.

The surgeon went to attend to other wounded men.

Erma sat alone by her boy, continually renewing the ice cloths that lay upon the shaved crown of his head. A low fire of green wood smouldered on the hearth. A rusty little tea kettle sang before it. All was very quiet within the poor hut; but outside the battle still roared and surged to and fro, forward and backward, like the ocean in a storm. Incessant and deafening volleys of musketry

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rolled and thundered over the earth, mingled with yells of rage or pain and shouts of defiance or victory. The whole air of heaven was filled with a sickening scent of blood, as of some vast, reeking slaughter place, and charged with a suffocating, sulphurous smoke, as if all the infernos had been opened at once—as no doubt they were!

As the sad day declined, the din of battle subsided. The firing sounded farther off, with less force and at longer intervals.

The sun set upon that most disastrous of battlefields, of which it might be said that neither army gained a victory, and both suffered a miserable defeat! Certainly, both lost heavily in killed and wounded, so that when night closed over the scene, the dead and the dying lay as thick upon the ground of that dark wilderness as the trees stood!

Erma, sitting in the quiet hut, watching by the bedside of her wounded boy, thought pityingly of those other poor boys lying dead where they had dropped, or writhing in the agonies of pain, fever and thirst.

Erma had seen many battlefields after the battle, and she knew all the ghastly horror of the aspect.

She looked at her own beautiful, pale boy, so calmly sleeping now, and she wept for those other poor boys—Ah! our armies were so full of mere boys, then!—sons of mothers far away, who loved them as well as she loved her own—but lying now where they had fallen, racked with pain, scorched with fever, parched with thirst, and all untended, on the ground of that veritably "howling wilderness."

She hoped that some men had been sent to minister to the wounded, but she knew from dark experience that where so many thousands must have fallen, many hundreds who might have been saved by timely aid, must die on the field for the want of attention.

She longed with an intense longing to do her little part in ministering to these. She knew that she could not do very much, even if she were at liberty now to penetrate into the hidden horrors of those awful woods—doubly hidden by the darkness and the thick, overhanging foliage. What, indeed, could one woman, with a lantern

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and a pail of water, do among so many thousand sufferers?

Still, she resolved, if she could only get some one to take her place by the side of her son and renew the ice cloths on his head whenever they became warm—a simple duty that almost any child or any crone could do, she would get a lantern and a pail of spring water, with a floating gourd upon it, and go into those gloomy woods, into that dark, blood-scented, sulphurous thicket of agony and violent death, to give the "cup of cold water" at least—not to all who needed, sorely needed, it—ah, me! —but to all that she could serve by coming and going many times and spending the night in the service.

She arose and went to the door of the hut several times, but saw no one with whom she could leave her boy.

At length, while she was sitting quietly by the bed, the door opened, and an aged negro woman entered the hut, went fumbling about in the semidarkness without seeing the intruders, found a tallow candle, knelt down by the smouldering fire, took up a little brand, blew it into a weak blaze and lighted her "dip."

Then she held it out at arm's length and peered around the little room, mumbling to herself:

"I reckon dem dere sojers done been in here an' stole ebery bressed fing I got! 'Deed, I hope dey ain't been done took my ole brack satin Methody meetin' bonnet, I do so."

Then, catching sight of the watching mother and her sleeping boy, as the light of her candle fell upon them, she exclaimed:

"Hi, honey! Who is you? An' who is dis yere w'ite man a-laying on my berry bes' bed?"—there was but one poor little one in the hut—"jes' like it 'longed to him?—Lor'," she continued, without waiting for an answer to her question. "I has been so scared! 'Deed I is, honey! 'Deed I ain't tellin' yer no lie. Soon's ebber dey began shootin' so, I run 'way out'n my house, an' runned all de way to Flat Run Church and fell down ebbery time dey fired. I fell down more'n forty times, I reckon, afore I got to de church! An' den I hided myse'f under de pulpit all day. Den I creeped out to-night, arter I was sure dey'd done shootin', an' t'ought I'd come home to look for

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somefin' to eat; 'caze de pit ob my stommick hab gone to my backbone wid fastin' so long. But I say, honey, w'y don't yer answer an' tell me who is yer, anyways, an' who is dat w'ite man—boy, I means, now I sees 'im good, wot's a-layin' on my berry bes' bed, jes' like it 'longed to 'im? My berry bes' fedder bed, too," she repeated.

"I am a hospital nurse, and this——"

"A—which, honey? A horse nuss? Nebber heerd tell ob sich a fing!"

"A soldier's nurse, aunty. I am a soldier's nurse, and this lad is my son," said Erma, gently.

"Oh, dat, indeed! Sojer's nuss! Wot's de matter ob de young boy, mist'ess?"

"He has been wounded in battle to-day."

"Now, dere, now! Now, jes' see dere, now! I jes' knowed dey would hit somebody wid all dat dere careless shootin' 'fore ebber dey got t'rough wid it all!" exclaimed the old darky, setting her candle down on the floor and dropping on to a three-legged stool.

Erma stared. She could not, all at once, comprehend the utter ignorance of the old negress, who, however, continued her monologue:

"Wot dey come down yere shootin' for, anyhow? We was all as peaceful an' as quiet as a Sunday arternoon in a churchyard, till dese dere yere shootin' people come troopin' down on us, makin' a noise fit to split yer head open, an' a smell o' brimstone 'nough to knock yer down! Wish de'd all take demselves off to w'ere dey come f'om. Do you know wot dey mean by it all, honey?"

"No, I do not!" answered Erma, most emphatically, partly because she deeply disapproved of war in all its shapes and forms, and partly because she despaired of making the old aunty understand the quarrel.

"Well, wish dey'd all go back w'ere dey come f'om, dat I do!"

"What is your name, aunty?" inquired Erma, gently.

"My name's yer old Aunt Becky, honey! 'Deed it is, chile! Yer ole Aunt Becky! I ain't tellin' yer no lie. Yer ole Aunt Becky! Dat's wot my sponses gimmy in baptism w'en I was a baby! Yer ole Aunt Becky, honey!" answered the woman, with the mumbling reiteration of her age and class.

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"Well, Aunt Becky, you see my poor boy lying here, woun——"

"Oh, yes, honey! I sees 'im good! Ne'mind wot I said 'bout my bes' bed. He's welkim to lie on it. So's you!" hastily interrupted the woman, with eager hospitality.

"Oh! thank you. I know it. I feel sure of it. But I was about to ask you——"

"For a cup o' tea, honey! I knowed it! I was finkin' ob dat same myse'f. An' glad I should be if I had it! An' welkim you an' de w'ite boy should be to de bes' ob it! But dere ain't a dust ob tea inter de house, honey! No, no; nor likewise up at de Wil'ness Tavern, 'cept it's sas'f'as tea! Dem yere Yankee 'lisherners hab 'vented us gettin' any! Dey won't let us hab no tea nor coffee, nor nuffin! 'Deed dey won't, honey! It's de trufe I'm a tellin' ob you! 'Tain't stinginess! Nobody can't say as yer ole Aunt Becky ebber was stingy!"

"I know it. I am sure of it. But I did not want any tea. I just want you to take my place here and sit by my son and keep the cold, wet cloth on his head, while I go out to look for—others who are hurt," added Erma, after a pause, for she did not wish to provoke a torrent of questions by speaking of the thousands fallen in the Wilderness.

"Odder people hurt, too? Well, now, it oughter be put a stop to!" exclaimed Aunt Becky.

"Will you stay by my boy, aunty?"

"'Course I will, honey! Oh, I'd let you do it an' go look arter dem wild boys wot has blowed demse'fs up like de Fourth ob July, on'y my ole legs is jes' wored out wid comin' f'om de Flat Run Church, 'cause, yer see, chile, I ain't as young as I used to be! You mightn't beliebe it, but I ain't! 'Deed, sometimes it do seem to me like I was growin' ol'er an' ol'er ebery year ob my life, it do so, honey."

"I do not wonder," said Erma, with a smile.

"But I'll sit by de boy, honey, an' watch him good 'till you comes back."

Erma then gave the woman the simple instructions required for the nurse's guidance on this occasion, and concluded by saying:

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"And if he should wake and ask for me, tell him where I have gone, and that will satisfy him."

"Yes, honey, but you ain't tole me wot yer name is all dis w'ile, nor likewise wot de young boy's name is."

"I am Mrs. Wolfsohn. My son is Rodolph Wolfsohn."

"Rode—wot, honey?" inquired the old woman, with a look of stupid wonder on her face.

"Rodolph Wolfsohn," repeated Erma.

"Well, here now! Jes' fink how fings do turn roun' in dis yere worl'!" muttered the woman, ruminatingly.

Erma was impatient to be gone. She lighted her lantern and took up a pail, and was about to leave the room when a question of the old negress arrested her steps.

"Did yer come f'om a place 'way out yonner call'—call'—le's see, now, wot was it call', again? Bigwoods? Blackwoods? Darkwoods? Yes, dat was it—Darkwoods. Did you come f'om a place call' Darkwoods, honey?"

"Yes, I did. Why do you ask?" anxiously inquired Erma.

"'Caze—'caze—my ol'est ole sonny-law, John, come f'om dat yonner place, an' lef' his ole mammy dere."

"What?" exclaimed Erma, putting down lantern and pail, and staring at the woman, her hurry over for the time being.

"Yes, honey. Trufe I'm tellin' ob you. My ol'est ole sonny-law, honey, wot married my ol'est darter, Mary, he 'longed to a young gemman wot libbed at a place call' Black—no!—Darkwoods, w'ich his name was Rode—off—Wolf's—son. I 'membered de name 'caze it was sich a wile beas' sort o' name. But dis young marster he had one grand wilyun ob a foot-father, wot sole all de niggers he could lay his han' on, and sole John way f'om his ole mammy—w'itch her name was—stay, now. Windy? No! Airy! Airy-balmy! No! Sho!—how forgetful I is! Airy Minty—dat was it! Airy Minty! I knowed it was somefing 'minded me ob breezes an' sweet yarbs. Airy Minty, honey!"

"Is—is—John living still?" anxiously inquired Erma.

"Hi, honey, got gwine to kill him? Sure he's libbin, an' got as good an' purty a colored gal for a wife as yer'd find in a day's journey. He has so! An' six as likely gals an' boys!"

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"Where is he living?" inquired Erma, her heart overflowing with gladness for the sake of her poor old servant, Araminta—Aunt Minty.

"He libs 'bout a stone's fro f'om dis berry place. Yer might see 'im to-morrow if ye liked—he, an' his wife an' chillun. He's his marster's oberseer, he is. An' a powerful preacher in de Methody meetin' house—dat he is! But you tell me, honey, long as you come f'om Big —Darkwoods, I mean—is his ole mammy, ole Aunt Breezy Minty libbin'?"

"Oh, yes, yes, she is living! She is living! And I am so glad she will find her son!" exclaimed Erma, joyfully.

"He be glad, too! He will so!"

"Now, I must go," said the lady, remembering the bitter need of those to whom she was about to minister, and taking up her lantern and empty pail.

"An' don't yer feel noways oneasy in yer min' 'bout de young boy, honey. I'll tend to 'im, an' keep de cole rags on his head to keep down de feber an' flumeation. Lor' I's been usen to sich w'en my ole marster use to hab de 'larial feber. I has so."

"Tell me where I can find a spring," said Erma, at the door.

"Right close by, honey. Right down in dat clump o' trees 'hind dis house, honey."

"Thank you. Very well." And the lady left the house.

She found the spring, and filled her pail, and took her way toward the battlefield.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BATTLEFIELD AT NIGHT.

The forest waves above them, her green leaves
Dewy with nature's tear-drops, as they lay,
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,
Over the unreturning brave. The grass
Which now beneath them, soon above will grow—
For earth is covered thick with other clay
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent—
Rider and horse, friend, foe, in one red burial blent.

—BYRON.

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Coming up the hill from the spring, she found herself in an open space where the ground was covered thickly with running huckleberry bushes and saturated with a heavy dew.

All around lay the gloomy wilderness, over which hung dark sulphurous clouds.

The night sky was half clouded over. Only a few stars looked down on the dismal scene.

Erma uttered a prayer for protection, guidance and help, and then hurried through the huckleberry bushes and blackberry brambles, regardless of torn clothes and scratched ankles, to the place of her destination.

As she neared the thicket of the woods, the sulphurous smoke lingering among the trees almost overpowered her. How long that smell of brimstone hung upon the sweet spring foliage! Other clouds, more horrible and loathsome still, hovered over that blood-soaked ground! Foul birds of prey flocked there, whirling around in low circles, or screaming through the night air.

Erma shuddered as she passed into the deeper darkness of the woods. No sentries had been placed on this side of the field. No one challenged or interrupted her. But as she passed on, sighs and groans and lamentations in every key of pain, anguish and despair assailed her ears.

She threw the bull's-eye of her lantern around and saw—what made her senses and her reason reel!—the fallen men lay thickly scattered around as far as her vision, aided by the ray from her lantern, coud penetrate.

"For Heaven's sake, water! A little water!" cried a gasping man close under her feet.

She set down her pail and her lantern, knelt beside the sufferer, raised his head and put the full gourd to his lips.

He drank, drew a deep sigh of infinite relief, fell back and died.

Erma could scarcely believe her eyes until she held the lantern over his face and saw the fatal wound that had lain him low.

She could not linger near him. He had ceased to suffer, and needed her help no longer. But others close around still suffered, and seeing the lantern move along

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like a will-o'-the-wisp through the darkness, knew that help was at hand, and weakly clamored for it.

"Water! water!" was still the burden of their cry.

And Erma went from one to another with her lantern, pail and gourd, and gave them drink to quench their burning and consuming thirst, until her pail was empty.

Then she hurried back to the spring behind the hut and filled her bucket again; but stopped as she passed the little house to look in upon the wounded boy.

She found him still sleeping calmly under the influence of the opiate he had taken, and still faithfully watched by old Aunt Becky.

Erma thanked the woman with a few encouraging words, and then went on to the woods to continue her work of mercy.

Nearly all night long Erma toiled at this task, going to and coming from the spring many times to refill her pail.

At length, toward the dawn of day, when she had emptied her bucket for perhaps the twentieth time that night, she found herself in a distant part of the woods, so much fatigued that she was compelled to sit down to rest.

Just where she sat the men lay very still, as in death or deepest sleep. No groans of pain, no cries of thirst, no heaving or writhing was seen or heard. It was a relief to be free from these distressing or appalling sights and sounds, even for a little while.

Presently Erma was startled by footsteps approaching the spot where she sat.

Her heart shrank with terror. What if this midnight walker should be one of those human beasts of prey who haunt battlefields to murder the dying and despoil the dead? What might not her own fate be? Erma shuddered with horror to think of it. She covered the bull's-eye of her lantern, and cowered down, with her white face upon the ground, hoping that her dark dress would tone in with its darkness and hide her from the ruffian.

While she lay there, quaking in mental terror, the heavy footsteps crackled through the undergrowth of the woods, coming very near.

Then another sound was heard—a fallen man awoke, turned, and groaned, and cried:

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"Water! water!" The incessant cry.

The footsteps suddenly ceased, and a shuffling noise showed that the pedestrian had stooped down beside the wounded soldier.

Was he going to finish the poor man and then despoil him?

Erma shuddered, but dared not move. She had no power to prevent the murder, and by showing herself she might—nay, must, she thought—draw down a doom worse than death upon her own head.

From her covert she watched and listened with breathless anxiety.

"Water! water!" moaned the wounded, perhaps the dying, soldier.

"Oh, Yankee! I've a great mind not to give you a drop! Serve you right to let you die of thirst! What business had you to come here trespassing on our ground? And do you think I am prowling about on the battle-ground to wait on our foes? Not much! I have a great mind not to give you a drop! But here, take it! Jehial, lift him up till I give him a drink."

Erma had started when the sound of that voice first struck her ear. Then she listened in amazement. Surely she knew those tones. Surely she recognized them, though she had not heard them for years.

She now arose to a sitting posture and peered out. The faint light of morning stealing through the opening of the trees, and falling on the group before her, assured Erma that her wild supposition was the true one. She did know that voice, and the owner of that voice.

Rising upon her feet, she went forward and turned the bull's-eye of her lantern full upon the form of the tall, dark-robed, stately amazon that had just risen from the side of the wounded soldier.

"Miss Barbra Gunn!—of all the people in the world!" she exclaimed.

"Yes! Miss Barbra Gunn, of all the people in the world. But who the deuce are you, pray?" exclaimed the latter.

"Don't you know me? Erma Wolfsohn?"

"Er—ma—Wolfsohn!" said Miss Barbra, slowly, staring at the speaker. "How came you here?"

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"I am a field nurse, and follow the army in that capacity; but I might ask the same question of you, Miss Barbra. How came you here?"

"I followed Blantyre's regiment as general utility. Yes! as soon as I heard the Yankees had invaded old Virginia, and the governor had made a call for troops, I up and had my two best wagons loaded, and the two strongest yokes of oxen put to them, and I followed the army to do what I could for the brave boys when they might be sick or wounded!"

"You, Miss Barbra! At your age?"

"What in the dee do you mean by my age? I am only just turned seventy, and I am as strong as a horse! I expect to live to be a hundred!"

"Did you bring any of your servants with you?"

"Yes! three! Jehial to drive the dun oxen, and Peter to drive the spotted oxen, and Minny to help me! Jehial stayed with me, but Peter and Minny deserted and ran away to the Yankees! Ur-r-r-r-r! If ever I get hold of that pair of traitors, I'll give it to them! I'll harness them both to my carriage, and make them draw it like beasts of burden! Ur-rr-rr-rr-ee!" she snorted.

"Oh, Miss Barbra, tell me some news of the friends at home! I have not heard from any of them for so many years!"

"Let me sit down, then. It takes a good deal to tire me, but I have had a good deal, and I am tired! Jehial! Go fill that pail again, and go around with it! Sit down, Erma! Sit down yourself, also! What is it now you want to know?"

"How are all the people around Ice Cliff?"

"That's a big question that I can't answer. But I can tell you of some of your friends. They have mostly got the demon in them! The quiet, friendly neighbors are all at swords' points with one another! Some in the Confederate army, some in the Union! Russ Blantyre is in the Southern army! So am I. So is Curry Bibb. Tom Morset is a leader of guerrillas. Lawyer Drummond is a lieutenant in the Union army. Dr. Dutton, surgeon in ditto. Your precious husband, a colonel in the same! Of course, you know that."

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"Tell me about the women. I want to hear about them. Beth Morset, Bab Drummond and all!" exclaimed Erma.

"All at loggerheads! Hating each other worse than the men do. Bab Drummond's husband is an officer in the Yankee army, consequently Bab will not even speak to Beth, whose lord and master is a guerrilla chief! And so it goes!"

"But their families? Their children?"

"Oh! everyone of them have lots of children—girls and boys. But if you expect me to give you all their names and ages, I can't do it. I haven't got time. I am rested now, and must resume work."

"So must I," said Erma.

And both women recommenced their task.

It was growing light now, and the eastern sky was reddening with the approach of the sun.

"Je-hi-al! where are you with that bucket?" shouted Miss Barbra, making the woods ring again.

"Here, mist'ess! Here, w'ere I can't leabe! Oh, for goodness' sake, mist'ess, come here! Some one as yer knows wants yer help!" returned the voice of the old negro.

Miss Barbra and Erma moved toward the spot from whence the call came.

They found old Jehial stooping over the prostrate form of a man in the uniform of a colonel in the Union army.

With an irrepressible cry of anguish, Erma recognized Rodolph Wolfsohn.

"Do not be alarmed," said the latter, in a weak but calm tone. "There is not much the matter! Right leg shot through and bone broken by a minie ball."

Erma acted promptly. She knew that she could not send Jehial to the ambulance, so she stooped and whispered:

"I will run all the way to the surgeon's quarters and return with help and a stretcher. I know that Miss Barbra Gunn will take care of you until I come back."

"Miss Barbra Gunn!" exclaimed the wounded man, in feeble surprise.

"Yes! And I'll look after you for the sake of old times, though you do not deserve it! turning against your mother State! I'll watch you till she comes back, al-

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though I suppose when your men come they will take me prisoner for my pains and clap me into the Old Capital prison at Washington. Oh! I have heard of that!"

Before Miss Barbra had finished her speech Erma was off to the ambulances.

She soon returned with four men and a stretcher.

Rodolph Wolfsohn was carefully lifted and laid upon it, and borne away, followed by Erma, leaving Miss Barbra Gunn and her chief of staff, Jehial, to attend to the other wounded until they could be picked up and removed from the ground.

As Erma and her sad little procession passed through the woods, they saw the agents of the Sanitary and Christian Commissions already at their humane work of healing and saving as many as they could.

Rodolph Wolfsohn was conveyed to a barn, which had been hastily converted into a field hospital, where many wounded men lay upon boards waiting the busy surgeon's probing knife or amputating saw.

When Wolfsohn's turn came and his limb was examined, it was discovered that amputation was unnecessary. The bone was set, splintered and dressed, and the colonel was once more placed upon a stretcher, to be conveyed to the hut where young Rody lay, half comatose between the effects of opium and a fractured skull. A cot was procured for the colonel's accommodation.

And there the father and son lay helpless for many days, nursed by Erma and old Aunt Bëcky.

Meanwhile, all the wounded who could bear moving were carried into Fredericksburg, to which point a great number of volunteer surgeons, nurses, and others sent by the Sanitary and Christian Commissions, had come down from Washington to meet them and take care of them.

And without more than a day's rest, Grant's army moved on toward Spottsylvania.

As the days passed in that little hut, Erma, dividing her attention between the wounded man and the wounded boy, heard continual rumors of that fearful campaign of marching and fighting that has left upon record the most extraordinary war history in the world.

It was late in June before the wounded pair could be

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conveyed to Fredericksburg and thence to Washington City.

Before Erma left the hut she made a point of sending for Aunt Becky's "sonny-law"—poor old Minty's first-born, John—and she had the delight of telling him that his good mother still lived and flourished no farther away than Washington City.

The middle-aged man's heart was filled with grateful joy. He reverently raised his hat, bowed his head and thanked the Lord.

Col. Wolfsohn, with his wife and son, went on to Washington City.

Both soldiers were pronounced unfit for military duty in the field and were transferred to the commissary department and stationed at the capital.

Erma was very calmly happy in the society of her recovered and reconciled husband and son; but never more happy than when she found old Minty and told her the news of her discovered and living son.

Years have passed since that saddest of summers. A generation has grown up since the civil war ended. Those brethren who were at swords' points then are reconciled now.

Col. and Mrs. Wolfsohn are living at Brighthome, surrounded by a fine family of growing children, and attended by a household of faithful servants, at the head of which, as butler and housekeeper, are Septimus and Minty—very aged now.

Miss Barbra Gunn is still living at The Marsh, and though she has passed her eightieth year, she is as belligerent, if not as vigorous, as ever. The other neighbors around Ice Cliff are flourishing and prosperous. Peace be with them all.

THE END.

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